PEEKSKILL USA

by HOWARD FAST

Here for the first time is a full and detailed story of what happened during the two bitterly remembered Peekskill incidents of 1949. Howard Fast who tells this story was not only eyewitness to what occurred at Peekskill,

SEE BACK COVER

(continued from front cover)

but was in each case one of the chief participants in the struggle. He brings to a contemporary event the trained observational facilities of a practiced reporter combined with the narrative skill of one of America's greatest living novelists.

We feel that *Peekskill: U.S.A.* will become one of the enduring classics of American reportage. Rarely has there been so intimate, yet objective and dispassionate a record of a contemporary event of importance. Rarely has modern history produced so frightening and so terrible an indictment of fascism by an eyewitness observer.

The Civil Rights Congress is proud to present this book. We believe that its publication is a milestone in the struggle for civil rights and against fascism. We also believe that we are giving the public an opportunity to participate in a literary event of no small importance. This new book by Howard Fast is not only very fine reporting, but fine literature as well.

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Peekskill: USA

a personal experience

Howard Fast

CIVIL RIGHTS CONGRESS: 1951

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Printed in the United States of America

FIRST PRINTING — January, 1951 — 5,000 copies
SECOND PRINTING — April, 1951 — 3,000 copies

To Paul Robeson

Introduction

THE NAME of Peekskill will forever be linked with the name of Paul Robeson. *Peekskill* is a milepost in the great anti-fascist struggles of progressive America. *Peekskill* will also in the future be synonymous with Negro-white unity in struggle. Thereby *Peekskill* becomes more than a name, more than a city; *Peekskill* has become a symbol of progressive America.

August 27, 1949 was almost the great day of American fascism. On August 27, 1949, fascism unloosed its worst filth and anger against the American people in general and the Negro people in particular; and on that day, because Negro and white stood together, supported by the working class, fascism failed.

Where is it that the fascists are not inhumanly stupid beasts? They do not understand the people's love of democracy, nor can they ever understand the people's hatred of fascism, which is almost a quality of life itself. And here in America they had no concept of the depth of the people's love for Paul Robeson.

How reaction honored that majestic figure of an American when those murderous imitators of Adolf Hitler selected the Paul Robeson concert as the point of consolidation of storm trooper organization! It was only their blind white chauvinism and their blind hatred and fear of Paul Robeson which led them to make so colossal a mistake.

Paul Robeson is as beloved to all decent Americans as he is, for

example, to the courageous anti-fascists of Spain before whom he sang his inspiring people's songs when they faced Franco in the trenches before Madrid. Paul Robeson is beloved of 475 million Chinese people. There is no child in Eastern Europe who cannot sing you one of the favorite songs of Paul Robeson. And among the people of Europe you will find an overwhelming love for this black giant of a man America has produced and given to the progressive struggles of all mankind.

When Paul Robeson made his memorable speech at the Paris Peace Conference, he declared with almost prophetic foresight, that Negroes who are lynched and degraded with impunity, who are jim-crowed and segregated even in so-called democratic armies, who are relegated to ghetto life, who are daily victims of police brutality, of malnutrition and of slum life, will not fight those whose program has, in a few short years, ended man's exploitation of man. When Paul Robeson said that, he identified Negro America with the best and most forward-looking elements of mankind.

American fascism did not want this man to elaborate upon those brief remarks. He had too much evidence to support his words. The case of the Trenton Six, of the Martinsville Seven, the case of Willie McGee, of Rosa Lee Ingram, and most clearly the case of the Communists, supported too well the arguments of Paul Robeson.

Reaction wanted to quiet his voice once and forever. The murder of Paul Robeson was a part of the official program of American reaction on August 27, 1949.

But the people took the issue under advisement and the fascist program was revised. The great lesson of *Peekskill* is that the American people have the will to fight back and the power to smash tyranny and fascism. *Peekskill* has taught us that 300 years of filthy racist propaganda, unchallenged by any moral crusade on the part of the church, has blunted but not destroyed the moral sensitivity of the white masses. It has proven that sections of labor are moving in defense of Negro rights, not through charity but animated by an understanding that neither worker nor Negro can win alone.

Spokesmen for the ruling cliques argue with great fervor, "If only the people of Europe knew us as we truly are they would willingly listen to our program for war and armaments."

Perhaps it is because the people of Europe know only too well what happened at Peekskill and what the meaning of Peekskill was that they doubt the "peaceful" purposes of American reaction. Perhaps it is because the people of Asia and Europe know the conditions under which the American Negro lives that they have such a great measure of distrust and contempt for those who scream of their right to moral leadership of the world.

"As we held the line at Peekskill, we will hold it everywhere."

This was the slogan that emerged from the Peekskill struggle. These words echo and re-echo throughout the land. This book will give impetus to these words.

These words are a reaffirmation of our will to struggle. August 27 and September 4, 1949, the two dates of *Peekskill,* are fixed upon the calendar of free America. Through this struggle we have come closer to the free America we all dream of.

Howard Fast adds to his stature with this simple story. He lived through both Peekskill incidents. He was in the front line of the battle against the fascists. That they were beaten is due in no small part to his heroic leadership.

Now to the greatest lesson that *Peekskill* taught us—unity, more unity, and still more unity of white and Negro America. Such unity guarantees greater victories for peace and democracy. Disunity spells death and world disaster.

The Civil Rights Congress, dedicated to the cause of constitutional liberties and civil and human rights, is proud to make this timely book available to the American people. We believe that it strengthens the arsenal of human liberty, that it will rearm the weak, clarify the thinking of those who are still confused, and refute those whose lies and vicious racism have brought such disgrace to our country.

WILLIAM L. PATTERSON

Preface

FROM AUGUST 24 TO SEPtember 4, 1949, I took part in a very strange and somewhat terrible incident, which has already become an important part of the postwar history of the United States. For many generations to come, the *Peekskill Affair* will be recalled and discussed, and it will remain for historians, with their broader and more complete point of view, to decide the final import and significance of this incident.

For myself, close as I am to it, I still see it in somewhat subjective terms. It was the first great open manifestation of American fascism; but whether it was part of some preconceived plan or test, or simply the culmination of events in preparation for the times we live in, I do not know. Only time can answer this and many other questions connected with Peekskill.

My own personal participation was something of an accident initially, although far from an accident as the series of events around the incident unfolded. It is not often the good fortune—or fate—of a writer to be so closely involved with events which must be written about. When it does happen, if the writer is a trained observer, the possibility of good prose description does exist, and this can be most valuable. Because I believe this, I offer this account of the eight days of Peekskill. I do not, however, put it forth either as a social study of the incident or as a complete factual itemization. For the most part, I tell only what happened immediately around me—what I saw with my own eyes. Where I go beyond that, I do so for the sake of continuity in dramatic terms, and where I draw conclusions, they are my own conclusions, based for the most part on my own experience.

I would like to state that I am most interested in presenting a truthful picture—again, within the limits of my observation and

information. We live in times when any statement of the left is greeted with suspicion if not with outright condemnation by the forces of the right; and since the bulk of the sources of public information are firmly in the hands of American reaction, it can hardly be expected that this account will be welcomed by them as an objective statement of what happened at Peekskill. As a matter of fact, I have never pretended to any sort of Olympian *objectivity*. My position, for many years, has been a partisan one, and I have never made any secret of that. At Peekskill, I could hardly be objective; objectivity is not for those who are fighting for their lives. I was partisan then; I am still partisan.

Yet I think that partisanship does not hinder, but rather helps toward the truth. An enormous body of written matter already exists on the *Peekskill Affair;* this is available to scholars, and it is not my intention to present a collation of this material. It is my intention to tell the story as I saw it.

In answer to those who may wonder why I waited so long before sitting down to this job, I can only answer that some degree of perspective is necessary to a coherent account of such a matter as this. Also, I was occupied with other writing tasks, and then interrupted by the Federal Government, which decided that I had to serve a three month prison sentence—as a lesson and a warning to others who might consider a police state an intolerable condition of things.

It was while I was in prison that I heard that the Westchester County Grand Jury, which had been sitting on the Peekskill case for many months, had finally brought in two indictments; and I recall tense days of waiting to hear whether—as it had been rumored —Paul Robeson and I would be the subject of these indictments. When I learned that we would not, I was both relieved and puzzled, for *frameup,* or, as the lawyers call it, *entrapment,* had been the pattern of this Peekskill business from beginning to end. At the same time, I do not delude myself into thinking that the last chapter to the *Peekskill Affair* has been written.

Part One

The Quiet Beginning

IT HAPPENED THAT IN AUgust of 1949, both my wife and I had much-needed vacations. She went to Europe; I rented a house in Croton-on-Hudson—some six miles from Peekskill—for myself, my two children, and their nurse. I was then engaged in writing an essay on the relation of literature to reality, and I felt that a month devoted to my work and the children—and away from the political turmoil which occupied so much of my life—was not only overdue but would be very good for me in every way.

In this I was not wrong. That August was a placid, cool month, with many sunny days and many pleasant hours, and for me a most welcome change. The house we had rented was a comfortable, rambling affair, set among the trees on the hillside, with a glimpse of the Hudson River from the upper windows. Mornings, I worked on my essay while the children played on the lawn. Afternoons, I was with them, and usually we spent the time swimming at a nearby pond. We had our evening meal together, and after the children were asleep I spent every night there in the house, reading or very occasionally talking with some friends who dropped in. It was, as I said, a very quiet and rewarding few weeks; my reading progressed and the essay began to near completion.

It was in the middle of this month that the phone rang one day, and when I answered it a young lady's voice asked whether I was Howard Fast, and when I said that I was, went on to ask whether I would be chairman of a concert to be given in the neighborhood in a few weeks.

"What kind of a concert?" I wanted to know.

"We give it each year."

"Who is we?" I asked her.

"People's Artists, I mean. And Pete Seeger will be there, and Paul Robeson. Do you know about People's Artists?"

I knew a good deal about People's Artists, and liked them as individuals and respected what they were trying to do as a group. Young people, by and large, they had dug up a tremendous lot of the folk song and folk tradition of America, and armed with their guitars, they were bringing it to the people everywhere, to trade unions and public meetings, to neighborhoods and settlement houses and summer resorts. They wrote new words to old melodies, and they made a continuity of the best musical tradition of America, from the time of the Revolution to the present day. It would be very hard to say no to a concert they were giving, but against that I had my absolute determination to live this month in isolated peace and quiet.

"I do know about People's Artists," I said. "But I really can't——"

"Look," she said, "I know your little girl loves to hear Paul Robeson sing, and it will be out in a lovely meadow on the picnic grounds, and it will be just like a picnic and all over by ten o'clock —and why don't you come? Won't you, please?"

There was more of this kind of thing, and finally I said that I would. She promised to write me a letter containing all details pertinent to my role at the concert, and then she hung up. It occurred to me afterwards that I had not even asked her name. A few days later the promised letter arrived, telling me that the concert would be held at Lakeland Acres Picnic Grounds a few miles north

of Peekskill proper, and that I would do well to arrive at seven o'clock so that there would be time to talk over the program. The letter also noted that this would be the fourth concert given by Paul Robeson in this vicinity. The first had been held in 1946 at Mohegan Colony, a summer resort of individual home owners nearby; the second had taken place a year later at the Peekskill Stadium; and the third was held in 1948 at Crompond, another village in the immediate area.

It is worth noting that this whole area along the Hudson River, from Croton to a dozen miles north of Peekskill, has for years been a favored summer vacation place for thousands of workers in the needle trades. They have built colonies and inter-racial camps, and they have made it possible for Negroes to get away from their city ghetto, and to live in peace and comfort for a few weeks during the summer. The workers built their houses with love and care and consideration, and these summer colonies nestle among the low hills and in the sheltered valleys, blending with the natural beauty of the countryside. Peekskill is the only town of any size thereabouts, and it is less an industrial center than a lower middle class shopping hub, a conglomeration of stores, filling stations, poolrooms, lunch counters and real estate offices, a backwash of a city, a festering shrinking forgotten city, a onetime prosperous riverboat station now left behind and by-passed by the rush of American industrial development.

So in this way, just as haphazardly as this, I was drawn into the Peekskill affair. I had no notion of what would happen, and because I had no notion, I decided that I would take my little girl, Rachel, with me to hear Paul Robeson sing. I looked forward to a delightful and rewarding evening. Having made that decision, I went back to my work, giving the business no further thought until the Saturday morning of August 27 drew around.

On that morning, J—— N——, an old friend of mine, one time editor of *New Masses* and now a feature writer on the New York *Daily Worker,* phoned and asked me whether I was going to take

my daughter with me. I said that I intended to, and he suggested that we go together. He lived then about a quarter of a mile from the house I had rented, and he said he would stop by for me. When I hung up the phone I discovered that Mrs. M——, the children's nurse, had overheard me. A motherly, and very wise Negro woman, she could be very firm at times; this was one of them.

"I would not take Rachel," she said.

"Why?"

"I just wouldn't."

"Why not? She loves Paul—and to hear him sing in the open like this will be a thing she'll always remember. I think it's important that she should come with me."

"I think it's important that she should not," said Mrs. M——.

"Why?"

"Maybe because I'm a Negro and you're white."

"What on earth," I wanted to know, "has that got to do with it?"

"Just don't take Rachel," she said firmly—and then I gave it up.

"All right, I won't," I told her. "But if you think that anything is going to happen, you're wrong. Nothing is going to happen."

That was in the morning. At noontime I was sitting on the lawn, watching my small son tumble in and out of a plastic wading pool, when a car drove up and two men, one a Negro, one white, got out. They introduced themselves to me. The Negro was a member of People's Artists, the white man a community leader.

"I thought it might help to have a talk with you before the concert," the Negro said. "Of course, you know what's going on?"

"Going on? How do you mean that?"

"In Peekskill," he said. "Haven't you seen the Peekskill papers?"

"As a matter of fact, I haven't. I haven't even seen a New York paper in the past few days."

"Then it's a good thing we have a chance to talk with you, because it seems there's going to be trouble."

I didn't believe it. A month in the country, a month of the kind

of quiet life I had been leading made me doubt that there was trouble anywhere—and if there was trouble, it wouldn't be here, not here in these quiet valleys. And why should anyone make trouble? This was not a political meeting or demonstration, but a concert to be held in the picnic grounds on a summer evening. Trouble didn't start that way. I said as much.

"Then you're wrong, Brother Fast," they told me. "You're wrong as hell."

"I don't think I'm wrong."

"Then listen to this." And the Negro read to me:

"It appears that Peekskill is to be treated to another concert visit by Paul Robeson, renowned Negro baritone. Time was when the honor would have been ours—all ours. As things stand today, like most folks who put America first, we're a little doubtful of that honor. . . ."

More of the same. "Now this," he said, "now listen to this":

"The time for tolerant silence that signifies approval is running out." He added, "That's from the *Peekskill Evening Star* of last Tuesday. Since then, they've worked themselves into a lather over this thing. The American Legion is going to march, and the local boys have been liquoring themselves up since this morning. On the other hand, some of the local residents have sent a telegram of protest to the DA, Fannelli, asking him to have plenty of cops and state troopers on hand, just in case. Maybe he will and maybe he won't. The point is, you've got to keep your eyes open."

I would keep my eyes open. At the same time, I had heard this kind of threat of violence for years on occasion after occasion, and I had discovered that the gentlemen of violence, while they talk a good deal, are far more conservative in putting it into play.

"I don't think anything will happen—I just don't think so."

They would see me about seven-thirty, they said. (But no one on the side of good-will came to the picnic grounds at seven-thirty that evening, as you will see.) They left half a dozen copies of *The Peekskill Evening Star* with me, and after they had gone I thumbed

through the papers, reading here and there bits of the stupid, sometimes pathological hatred and bias that sprinkled its pages so liberally. There were threats of violence, and then disavowals of violence; there were the clumsy, poorly-composed barbs of anti-Semitism and anti-Negroism. Here, microcosmically, this dull, tawdry little journal was repeating and vaunting all the pompous phrases of post-war anti-Communism, anti-humanism. Their efforts to wrap the filth in a high-toned package became ludicrous —but no more ludicrous than the efforts of their esteemed contemporaries on the great New York City journals. As witness:

"It is unfortunate that some of the weaker-minded are susceptible to their fallacious teachings unless something is done by the loyal Americans of this area. Quite a few years ago a similar organization, the Ku Klux Klan, appeared in Verplanck [a village nearby] and received their just reward. Needless to say, they have never returned. I am not intimating violence in this case but I believe we should give this matter serious consideration and strive to find a remedy that will cope with the situation the same way as Verplanck and with the same result that they will never reappear in this area. . . ."

Thus from *The Peekskill Evening Star,* and more and more of the same. It would require a Mark Twain to do critical justice to such highly original use of the English language, and thinking of that I began to lose some of my sun-nurtured security. Here was a monstrous and sanctimonious piece of ignorance from a group of people who had enshrined ignorance as a God worthy to share the temple with the dollar sign.

This uneasiness resulted in a decision to take no chances on not gaining entrance to the picnic grounds. Even if part of the audience did not arrive, the chairman, at least, should be there. I would leave, therefore, at six-thirty. It could not possibly take more than twenty minutes to drive to the picnic grounds. I had no car of my own, but had rented for the month a 1940 Plymouth four-door, an old but responsive automobile which played no inconsiderable

part in my adventures of the coming week.

Before I left, I told Mrs. M——that I might be rather late, since one couldn't count on the regular schedule. When J—— N—— comes," I said to her, "tell him I've gone on ahead. I'll see him there."

Part Two

The Night of Terror

THAT GOLDEN EVENING of August 27 remains in my mind most clearly, most softly; it was such a soft and gentle evening as one finds on the canvas of George Inness, and even he could create that dewy nostalgia only when he painted one part or another of the wonderful Hudson River Valley. By choice, I took the little back roads twisting among the low hills and narrow valleys. I avoided the business section of Peekskill, but found the state highway north of the town. I had never been to the Lakeland Picnic Grounds before, and I drove slowly, looking for the entrance—which is on Division Street, a three-mile stretch of country road which connects Peekskill with the Bronx River Parkway.

Yet I couldn't have missed the entrance. Hundreds of yards before I reached it I found cars parked solidly on either side of the highway, which made me wonder since it was more than an hour before the concert was scheduled to begin; and at the entrance itself there was an already unruly crowd of men. Still, they didn't try to stop me, but only jeered and thumbed their noses at me as I turned left into the picnic grounds. Only one more car was permitted to enter after mine; then the entrance was sealed off.

Just inside the grounds I stopped my car. There, a few yards

from the road, a handful of teen-age boys and girls had gathered.

There were not more than five of them and they were trying to hide their nervousness at the jeering, hooting crowd on the road. They had come up from New York to be ushers at the concert. I told them who I was and they seemed glad that I was there, but they were still frightened.

"What shall we do?" they asked.

"Who's running things?"

They didn't know, they said. It was so early—they didn't think anyone had come yet. But maybe there was someone down below.

"Well," I told them, "don't let anyone in who isn't here for the concert. Just keep cool and be calm and nothing will happen." That seemed to be a refrain of mine, that nothing would happen, that nothing could happen. "I'll park my car and see if I can't find someone to take things in hand."

To understand what happened from here on, you must have in your mind a clear picture of Lakeland Picnic Grounds and of the area where the concert was set up. The entrance to the grounds is a left turn off the main road as you drive from Peekskill; the entrance is double, coming together in Y shape to a narrow dirt road. About eighty feet from the entrance the road is embanked, with sharp dirt sides dropping about twenty feet to shallow pools of water. About forty feet of the road is embanked in this fashion, and then for a quarter of a mile or so it sweeps down into a valley —all of this private road and a part of the picnic grounds. At the end of this road, there is a sheltered hollow with a broad, meadow-grass bottom, a sort of natural arena, hidden by hummocks of low hills from the sight of anyone on the public highway. It was in this hollow that the paraphernalia for the concert had been set up: a large platform, two thousand wooden folding chairs, and a number of spotlights powered by a portable generator.

I looked at my watch before I drove down to the hollow, and it was just ten minutes to seven. Parking my car against a clump of trees to the side of the platform, I got out and wandered around

rather aimlessly. The platform was ready, the chairs set up, the spotlights in place, and there was a long picnic table piled with songbooks and pamphlets. As I came in, a large bus had just discharged its passengers, boys and girls, Negroes for the most part, who had come early to be ushers. The bus lurched around and departed in a cloud of dust; the boys and girls drifted across the meadow, walking slowly and contentedly in the golden light of the evening. About a hundred and twenty other people were already on the scene, most of them women and small children, and they too were making a picnic afternoon of it before the concert began, some of them sprawling comfortably on the grass, some of them at the rustic tables, some sitting on the chairs. A party of boys and girls from Golden's Bridge, a summer colony, sat on the platform, their legs dangling. None of them were much over fifteen; most of them were much younger. A few of these people had come by car; many had walked to the picnic grounds from summer homes nearby. The children from Golden's Bridge had come down in a large truck which was parked now next to my car—and which was destined to play an interesting role that night. Just by the good grace of fortune, half a dozen merchant seamen who were vacationing in the neighborhood had decided to come early; I had good reason to be grateful for them and for four other trade unionists who happened to be present.

But none of these, I discovered, knew who was in charge of the concert—and as it turned out those in charge never reached the picnic grounds. I inquired for a while, then I gave it up and perched myself on one of the tables and settled down to wait. It was seven o'clock now, and from where we were in the hollow there was no sign of trouble.

A boy running brought the trouble to us. I watched him as he came in sight around the bend of the road, running frantically, and then we crowded around him and he told us that there was trouble and would some of us come—because the trouble looked bad; and he was frightened too.

We started back with him. There were twenty-five or thirty of us, I suppose; you don't count at a moment like that, although I did count later. There were men and boys, almost all the men and boys, and a few girls too. We ran at a jog-trot along the dusty road, but still I thought that this would be no more than foul names and fouler insults, since I had never known the kind who were up there on the road to show courage unless they caught someone alone and the odds were twenty to one.

So we ran on up to the entrance, and as we appeared they poured onto us from the road, at least three hundred of them, with billies and brass knucks and rocks in clenched fists, and American Legion caps, and suddenly my disbelief was washed away in a wild melee. Such fights don't last long; there were three or four minutes of this, and because the road was narrow we were able to beat them back, but the mass of them filled the entranceway, and behind them were hundreds more, and up and down the road hundreds more. If you have never been in a trap with no way out and a thousand people grinning with malice and screaming in hate, you won't know what it was like. And now I saw why there were no more people coming into the concert. One of the forks in the road was piled high with rocks, a great barricade of rocks, and the other had a Legion truck parked across it. So we were closed in and there was no way out, and the odds were twenty to one, precisely as they required them.

I said that we beat them back and held the road for the moment, panting, hot with sweat and dust, bleeding only a little now; but they would have come at us again had not the three deputy sheriffs appeared. Our thanks to those three miserable men; they shouldered through the crowd, through the wall of alcohol-saturated air, and their gold badges gleamed in the sunset.

They hefted their holstered guns, and they turned and spread their arms benignly at the mob. "Now, boys," they said, "now, take it easy, because we can do this just as well legal, and it always pays to do it legal."

"Give us five minutes and we'll murder the n—— bastards," the boys answered.

"Just take it easy—just take it slow and easy, boys, because it don't pay to have trouble when you don't have to have no trouble."

And then the three deputy sheriffs turned to us and wanted to know what in hell we were doing there making all this kind of trouble.

I kept glancing at my watch. It was ten minutes after seven then. I also had a chance to look at the "boys" in the Legion caps, and they were by no means boys. They were in their thirties and forties and fifties—many of them in their fifties—and they were not *lumpen* either, not in the strict sense of the word. Most of them were prosperous-appearing men, well set up, well dressed, real-estate men, grocery clerks, lunch counter attendants, filling station hands and more of the kind. Tip over any gin mill in Peekskill or Shrub Oak, and this is what you would get. Throw in a couple of hundred "decent" citizens, a hundred teen-agers whose heads were filled with anti-Communist sewage; add a hundred pillars of the local Catholic church, half a hundred college students home on vacation, half a hundred workers drawn along, and two or three hundred of the sweepings and filth of that whole Hudson River section, and you have a good idea of what we faced there that night. Liquor them up to a high point of courage, give them odds of twenty to one, put the police on their side—and then you have the rest of the picture; and these were the "boys" whom the deputy sheriffs held up for just enough minutes to enable us to survive.

Not that the deputies wanted that; but it was a beginning and there was no precedent for this kind of thing in Westchester County in New York State, and the three sheriffs with the polished gold-plated badges were uncertain as to how to play their own role. For that reason they held back the "boys" and asked us what the hell we were doing there making this kind of trouble.

I became the spokesman then, and a good many of the things I did afterwards were the result of this—chiefly because I was older than most of our handful and because the merchant sea-

men and the trade unionists nodded for me to talk. Anyway, I had agreed to be chairman and it seemed that this was the kind of concert we would have, not with Paul Robeson and Pete Seeger singing their lovely tunes of America, but with a special music that had played its melody out in Germany and Italy. So I said that we were not looking for any trouble but were here to hold a concert, and why didn't they clear the roads so that our people could come in and listen to the concert in peace?

"You gimme a pain in the ass with that kind of talk," said one of the deputies delicately. The others stood there looking at us. Very clearly do I remember them. We cut deputy sheriffs to pattern in America; their bellies slopped over their belts; their faces were loose and full of hate; and they feared only the responsibility for what was happening that night and they desired only that it should happen in spite of themselves. So they said:

"Just cut out the trouble. We don't want no trouble and we don't want no trouble-makers."

I explained it again. I explained to them carefully that we were not making trouble, that we had not lured these three hundred innocent patriots to attack us, and that all we desired was for them to clear the road so that people could come to the concert.

"How in the hell can we clear the road? Just look up there," they told me.

"Tell them to get out and they'll get out," I said.

"Don't tell me what to tell them."

"Look, mister," I said. "We hold you responsible—for whatever happens here."

"Up your ass," said the guardian of the law.

"We'll talk to the boys," another said.

And then they talked to the "boys," and we had five minutes. I didn't listen to what they said to the boys. I was beginning to realize that they had no intention of doing anything about them, and when I looked up at the road and saw the roadblocks and the solid mass of the American Legion, I began to realize that not

only was it extremely unlikely that anyone else on our side would get in, but quite unlikely that any of us already here would get out. There was the beginning of a shock in that realization, but only the beginning—the full impact would not happen until much later. It was still daylight; the world of the Hudson River Valley was still bathed in a golden glow; we were still people who had come to hear a concert. You do not adjust immediately to the fact of death; death is embarrassingly dramatic, and it does not happen in this fashion in the United States of America. Yes, there would be trouble, but nothing highly dramatic or full of dangerous content.

Let me make the point. Just as the sheriffs turned back to talk to the mob, a man came walking through. Precisely in that manner, almost as an abstraction, this man calmly walked through the mob and up to me, and precisely because he proceeded in that manner and was so much not of this world, they let him through. People do strange things at strange times. This man was in his middle twenties. He was tall; he wore a beard, a beret, and loose, brightly-colored slacks. He had stepped out of the time-worn pages of Leonard Merrick, and what he was doing west of the left bank I don't know. But there he was, and I asked him who in hell he was and where in hell did he come from?

"I'm a music lover," he said.

No self-respecting writer dares to invent such things; but they happen. "Can you fight, Music Lover?" I asked him.

"I can't and I won't." There was indignation and disgust in his voice.

"But you can and you will, Music Lover," I pointed out. "Otherwise, go back up there. This time they'll tear you to pieces."

Those with me there on the road will remember the scene and bear witness to it. Later that evening I spoke to the music lover again. I never learned his name; he will always be Music Lover to me, but when I spoke to him again he had lost his beret, his slacks were in shreds, and there was blood all over him—and a wild glint of battle in his eyes.

"By God, I *can* fight!" he said in triumph. He had learned that, as many of us did that night, as did a Negro lad of sixteen. It was a little later, when we were organizing our squads, that this Negro lad started off the road across the fields. I called him back and he stood there, full of shame and fear and full of all the thoughts and bitter visions of Negroes who had been lynched and tarred and feathered and beaten to death and tortured beyond human belief.

"I can't fight, Mr. Fast," he said. "I can't, and I got to get out of here, I got to!"

"And if they get you out on the fields, do you know what they'll do to you?"

"I know, but I can't fight."

"You can fight," I said. "Sonny, you can, as good as I can, and that isn't much good, but we both can. So let's both stay here and fight."

I spoke to him later. His scalp was open six inches across the top, and the blood was running over him like a little river. By virtue of what force he still walked, I don't know, but he said, quite calmly,

"I'm hurt, Mr. Fast, and if you think I'm hurt bad, I'd like to lie down a little, but if you think I'm all right, I can still fight."

These are only two out of the many things of the sort that happened that night; I make a point with them, that it is hard to adjust quickly to the imminence of death, which is so final and in many ways so obscene a matter.

The sheriffs were talking, and down in the hollow were women and little children, and I began to think of what would happen to them if that mob on the road broke through us and got down there. The men and boys, Negro and white, had clustered around me in the little respite, and I was supposed to do something because I had written many books in which people did things in times like this, so I asked them if they wanted me to do it, and they nodded.

"All right," I said. "We're in a very bad place but we'll keep our

heads and in a little while some real cops will come and put an end to all this insanity. Meanwhile, we've got to keep that mob here where the road is narrow and high, and it's a good place to defend in any case. We keep them here because there's a lot of kids and women down below. That's our whole tactic. Agreed?"

"Agreed," they said.

"All right. Just two things. Let me do the talking and let me decide when there's a quick decision, because there may not be time to talk it over. Is that all right?"

They said yes, and our time was running out. A compression of incident and event began. First I told the girls to run back down the road, get all the women and children onto the platform, keep them there for the time being, and send every able-bodied man and boy up to us. Then I asked for a volunteer.

"I want someone to crawl through those bushes, reach the road, find a telephone, and call the troopers—call the *New York Times* and the *Daily Worker,* call Albany and get through to the governor —I want someone who can do that."

I got him. I don't know what I can say about him, except that he had great inventiveness and lots of guts. He was small and bright-eyed, and his name, A—— K——, will stay in my mind a long time and I have never seen him since that night. But three times he went back and forth through that howling mob, and he did what he was supposed to do.

Now the remaining men from below appeared and I counted what we had. All told, including myself, there were forty-two men and boys. Just about half were Negro, and about half were in their teens. I divided them quickly into seven groups of six, appointing a leader for each group. Three lines of two groups each—in other words, three lines of twelve—formed across the road where the embankment began. Each line anchored on a wooden fence, our flanks protected by the ditch and the water below. The seventh group was held in reserve in our rear.

I looked at my watch again. It was 7:30 p.m. The three deputy

sheriffs had disappeared and we never saw them again that night. The mob was rolling toward us for the second attack.

This was, in a way, the worst attack of that night. For one thing, it was still daylight; later, when night fell, our own sense of organization helped us much more, but this was daylight and they poured down the road and into us, swinging broken fence posts, billies, bottles, and wielding knives. Their leaders had been drinking from pocket flasks and bottles right up to the moment of the attack, and now as they beat and clawed at our lines, they poured out a torrent of obscene words and slogans. They were conscious of Adolf Hitler. He was a god in their ranks and they screamed over and over,

"We're Hitler's boys—Hitler's boys!"

"We'll finish his job!"

"God bless Hitler and f—— you n—— bastards and Jew bastards!"

"Lynch Robeson! Give us Robeson! We'll string that big n—— up! Give him to us, you bastards!"

I remember hoping and praying that Paul Robeson was nowhere near—that he was far away, not on the road, not anywhere near.

"What Medina started, we'll finish!" they howled. "We'll kill every commie bastard in America!" Oh, they were conscious, all right, highly conscious.

I am not certain exactly how long that second fight lasted. It seemed forever, yet it couldn't have been more than fifteen minutes. But in that time the sun sank below the hills to the west of us and the shadow of twilight came.

We concentrated on holding our lines. The first line took the brunt of the fighting, the brunt of the rocks and clubs. The second line linked arms, as did the third, forming a human wall to the mob. In that fight four of our first line were badly injured. When they went down we pulled them back, and men in the second line moved into their places. It was a beautiful piece of organization on the part of everyone concerned, in some ways a

miracle of organization. Here were forty-two men and boys who had never seen each other before for the most part, and they were fighting like a well-oiled machine, and the full weight of three hundred screaming madmen did not panic them or cause them to break. By sheer weight we were forced back foot by foot, but they never broke the three lines.

And then they drew off. For the moment they had had enough. They drew off, leaving about twenty feet between the front of their mob and our line of defense. There were more of them now, many more of them; the solid mass of their bodies and faces stretched back to the public road and along the road.

On our part, we were hurt, but not so badly that every man couldn't stand on his feet. We relieved the worst battered of the front line, linked arms and waited.

"Now we're all right," I told myself. "We're alive and this can't go on much longer. The state troopers will have to get here."

How many times I told myself that in the course of the evening! But there were no state troopers, no police, but instead a half-hysterical girl from the hollow below who panted,

"They've crossed over the hills and we've got to have some men down there!"

"How many are there?"

"I don't know. I counted twelve or fifteen."

I detached our seventh squad on the double, which left us with thirty-six to hold the road. But before they left I told one of them, the driver of the big truck that had brought the children down from Golden's Bridge, to pull his truck up the road to where the embankment began and to swing it broadside and across the road. I did this because we had been pushed back more than twenty feet in the course of the fighting. A few feet more, and we would no longer have the protection of the embanked road, and then they could simply swarm around us and it would be all over. But with the truck to back us up we could hold that embankment a long time.

As it darkened, a qualitative change came into the ranks of the fascist mob, a sense of organization. Three men appeared as their leaders, one a dapper, slim, well-dressed middle-aged man who was subsequently identified by people on our side as a prosperous Peekskill real-estate broker. A fourth man joined them, and a heated discussion in whispers started. At the same time, cars up on the road were swung around so that their headlights covered us. Though the police and state troopers were remarkably, conspicuously absent, the press was on the scene. Newspaper photographers were everywhere, taking picture after picture, and reporters crouched in the headlights taking notes of all that went on. In particular, my attention was drawn to three quiet, well-dressed, good-looking young men who stood just to one side of the beginning of the embankment; two of them had shorthand notebooks in which they wrote methodically and steadily. When I first saw them I decided that they were newspaper men and dismissed them from my mind. But I saw them again and again, and later talked to them, as you will see. Subsequently, I discovered that they were agents of the Department of Justice. Whether they were assigned to a left-wing concert or an attempted mass murder, I don't know. They were polite, aloof, neutral, and at one point decently helpful. But they were always neutral—even though what they saw was attempted murder, a strangely brutal, terrible attempt.

The four men in front of the mob broke off their discussion now, and one of them, a good-looking man of thirty or so, came toward us. He wore a white shirt, sleeves rolled up; his hands were in his pockets; he walked to our line and in a not unfriendly manner said,

"Who's running this?"

"I'll talk to you," I said.

He told me he was a railroad worker, a Peekskill resident, and had been drawn into this because he belonged to the local Legion post. "I don't like commies no better than the next one," he said, "but this kind of thing turns my stomach. I'm on the wrong

side. I should be with you guys instead of them. What I want to know is this—will you call it off if we do?"

"We never called it on," I said.

"Well, someone did, and now will you call it off?"

"And do what?"

"Clear out?"

"If you empty the road and let us get a police escort, we'll clear out. We got a hundred and fifty women and kids down there in the hollow and we're not going to send them into that pack of wolves."

"Let me try," he said.

"O.K.—we don't want any more of this."

He went back and resumed his whispered argument with the three leaders of the mob, and now behind us the truck appeared. I dropped back to help get it across the road, and when it was in place, blocking the road, I had a quick conference with two of the trade unionists. We agreed to spar for time—to do anything for time, and they pressed me to try to continue the conversation with the railroad worker. Since there was no sign of troopers or police or any relief, one of the trade unionists agreed to try to get through their lines and phone for help. But as he slipped over the embankment they attacked us again, and that was the last I saw of the railroad worker.

This attack was more deliberate. They closed slowly with all their weight, forcing us back until our three lines were pressed solidly against the truck, and they punished our front line badly —concentrating their attention upon a tall, well-muscled Negro worker who had already given a good account of himself. Like yapping dogs around a huge wolf, they clawed at him and he swept them off and drove them back with his fists. This I remember, and a bit here and there, but otherwise my attention was in front of me. I had not fought this way in fifteen years, not since my days in the slums where I was raised, not since the gang fights of a kid on the New York streets; but now it was for our lives,

for all that the cameras were flashing and newspaper men taking it down, blow by blow, so you could read in your morning papers how a few Reds in Westchester County were lynched. Only we would not be lynched and we drove the great, sick, screaming weight of them back, and once again there was a clear space in front of us.

It was night time now. And now, for the first time, I understood clearly the temper of that gang out there, and for the first time I realized that it was very likely that all of us would die there that evening. Our lines leaned against the truck, half of us bleeding, all of us sobbing, our clothes torn, our scalps open, our faces scarred —and already it seemed that the nightmarish battle had gone on forever.

"How much more?" someone asked.

They were screaming at us in a full frenzy now, a frenzy of sick hate and bitter frustration. They were full of the taste of death. "You never go out!" they screamed. "Every n—— bastard dies here tonight! Every Jew bastard dies here tonight!"

And the reporters watched calmly and took notes, as did the justice agents.

I looked at my watch because it seemed that forever had gone by. It was only a little after eight o'clock, not much more than an hour and a half since I had kissed my daughter and told her that I would listen to Paul's songs and tell her all about them. She had asked, "Would he sing the one for me"? She meant "Water boy—water boy—," the song he had once sung to her, swinging her back and forth in his great arms. And now they were screaming for the killing of him or of ourselves. It does not seem real now that the knowledge and certainty of death should have been in each one of the thirty-six of us, but it was. There was no way out, and we were bloodied and soon we would not be able to fight anymore. I know I faced that. It appeared a curious way to die, there in that little corner of Westchester, but it was reasonable and there was a logic within it, and I know that when I spoke to the others afterwards, they felt that same logic. . . .

Three Negro girls came running up from the hollow. It was all right, they said, it was all right because our six down below had beaten off the attack and scattered the hoodlums into the night. But their eyes widened and their bodies grew stiff at what was up there on the road, the screaming noise of it. The attack was starting again.

"Lie down in the truck," I told them. "It's all right, all right, all right here and down below, but you can't go back now. Lie down in the truck." I had seen shadowy figures moving over the hills on our left.

Then we were fighting again, and again they were clawing at the huge Negro worker in our front row. They came with their rocks and their fence posts and their knives, and again we beat them off. They had such weight and so little courage that we beat them off and drove them back and back, until there was a good thirty feet clear before us, and once again we fell back to lean panting and bleeding against the truck. But now there were three who could no longer stand, and we helped them into the truck where they lay quietly. We had no means of first aid, no medicine nor bandages and no time for such.

Now there was a sudden brilliant glare and the hills to our left stood sharp and black against a yellow background. There was a moment of silent cessation, and one of our men leaped up on the truck and cried,

"A cross is burning!"

We could only see the glare, but the symbolic meaning was not lost upon us. In this sweet land the movement had been rounded out; the burning cross, the symbol of all that is rotten and mean and evil in our land had blessed us. Our night was complete, and we would do well to kneel before the new patriots.

We didn't kneel. We locked arms, the better to support each other, and as that whole great mob rolled down upon us, well over a thousand of them now, we began to sing,

"We shall not—we shall not be moved!
We shall not—we shall not be moved!
Just like a tree that's standing by the water,
We shall not be moved!"

Consider the scene: there are only thirty-two of us now, with our backs against the truck, and we and the road across the embankment in front of us are bathed in the glare of headlights and spotlights that have been rigged from the road. All the rest is in darkness, and now into the light come the "new Americans," brandishing the fence rails they have stripped from along the road, swinging their knives and billies, a solid mass of them back to the public highway, rolling down to turn in for the kill and the great lynching, which is their peculiar privilege in a land which provides freedom for all except those who do not wholly agree with the gentlemen in Washington. It is a full hour and a half now since the fighting began, and there has been time enough for the news of what is happening at Peekskill to be wired to every corner of the nation. The press is here to see the great lynching, every New York newspaper, their crack writers and photographers, but not one policeman and not one state trooper—not one.

So they came in for the kill, and the singing stopped them. You would have had to be there to understand that; those of us who were there understood it when it happened; it was no miracle to us, but logical and reasonable—for I think that at that point all of us stopped being afraid and stopped praying for a way to get out of that hellish valley. We simply stood there in our three lines, arms locked, singing that fine old song which, more than any other, has become the anthem of the democratic forces of America.

Many, many times, for as long back as I can remember, I have heard people singing that old hymn, but I never heard it sung as it was sung that night, swelling out over the lunatic mob, over the road and over the hills, full of the deep rich voices of men who had fought so well. It was a moral enigma to the Legion

heroes. They saw a line of Negroes and whites, arms locked, ragged and bloody, standing calmly and singing—and the singing stopped them. They halted a dozen feet from us, and their screaming stopped. They stood there in silence, watching us and listening to our song and trying to understand what sort of people we were—that has always been a difficult thing for them to understand. And then one of them threw the first rock.

They didn't want to touch us now, or they couldn't, so they turned to the rocks. They moved back and gave themselves more space for throwing. First a rock here and there, then more, and then there was the heavy music of them as they beat a tattoo against the metal side of the truck. We continued to sing. A rock as big as a grapefruit thudded into the belly of the Negro next to me, the one who had fought so well when they clawed onto him. He doubled up and rolled over—and we helped him back to the truck. A Negro lad of seventeen or so received a rock the size of a baseball full in his face; one moment his face, and then a bleeding mass of broken teeth and smashed nose. The white man on my left was struck in the temple and collapsed without a sound. You didn't have to look; when you heard the fleshy thud, the sound of bone and skin breaking, you knew that someone was hit and that there was one fewer to stand on his feet and face the mob, and it was happening very quickly. The volley of rocks had become a rain, and it was just a miracle that so many missed us and crashed against the truck behind us. First I counted how many of us were hit, and then I stopped counting and dropped back to the truck and put my head together with one of the seamen.

"Five minutes more of this," he said, "and we'll be finished." A rock had caught him in the groin and he stood bent over, his face wracked with pain.

I had a notion, something I remembered from the war, and I told him about it quickly. What mattered were the women and children down in the hollow. We would do them no good if we became a heroic pile of corpses up here on the road. As long as we

could hold this section of embanked road, it was quite proper for us to stay here. But it was now evident that we could no longer hold the road, and therefore it was incumbent upon those of us still standing to get down to the hollow, where perhaps we could hold the mob off a while more. Minutes mattered, for we still believed that at any moment the state troopers would turn up. Yet if we broke our formation they would be on us and we wouldn't have a chance. Now suppose, I suggested, that we use the truck as a moving shield, a reverse tank tactic, that we make a group in front of it, running slowly, while the driver takes it down to the hollow in low gear.

"Let's try it," he agreed. "We can't stay here."

While I explained it to the truck driver the seaman whispered our plan along the line. Suddenly the motor roared.

"All right—let's go!"

There were about twenty or twenty-two of us still on our feet. We dashed around the truck as it lurched forward, backed onto the embankment, and then swung onto the road. And then, because the driver had forgotten to switch on his lights—an understandable error, considering that night—he drove off the road, missed it completely, and sent his truck lurching and careening across the meadow into the night. It was the one bit of insanity needed to complete the nightmare that evening had become. One moment the truck was with us; the next, we were standing exposed on the road with the howling mob flowing down on us.

We ran down into the hollow, and as long as I live I will remember watching, as I ran, the careening truck, going off across the meadow, in and out of ditches, over humps, for all the world like a heavy tank. How the driver kept it upright, how he avoided breaking every spring, I don't know—but later he was able to drive the truck and the wounded men in it, as well as two badly beaten fascists he picked up, to the local hospital.

Now we ran, and we held together as we ran. As we swung around the curve of the road below I saw the amphitheatre for the

first time since I had driven in earlier that evening, the platform with the women and children on it and huddled close to it, the two thousand chairs standing empty and unaware of the audience which had never arrived and never would, the table of songbooks and pamphlets—and all of it bright as day in the brilliant glare of floodlights. These floodlights lit the whole of the meadow, and as we swung around at the bottom we saw the mob of screaming, hate-maddened fascists break over the hillside and pour down into the light.

For just a moment we stood there trying to gain our breath, shoulder to shoulder for the warmth and comfort of each other, watching the front of that mob break onto the flat. I don't know what the others thought, but it is most likely that we all thought something of the same nature. To me it was the end, which had been inevitable through the night, and I didn't care much anymore. I knew only hate and loathing for the unreasonable facsimiles of human beings who were bent, with such sick intentness, upon our death, and who had sought us out here to pursue the filthy legend that was drummed into them by radio, press and church. Didn't they have families, homes, ways of decency, any good, any warmth —that they sould dedicate themselves to this kind of horror? What else did I think? I thought that as long as we were able we should keep them away from our women and children, and it must have been that the others of the handful of us who were left thought the same thing—for we knew what we were going to do and we did it without any consultation or deliberation.

We drove into them. Close together, like a wedge, we charged into that mob and fought our way, half-insanely, deep into their heart. This was our moment, our one moment. Until then we had defended and held and taken what they had to offer, but now we were as full of hate as they, and our hate took hold of us, and if the odds were one thousand to twenty-one, then you can take good cheer; for this was a measure of the courage of this kind of swine when they have no guns in their hands and when they are not

backed by the police. For after two or three minutes the mob broke and ran; they didn't like the taste of it in reverse, and the odds were large but not large enough, and they broke and ran—and all of us who were there saw it and will attest to it.

For my own part, I saw it narrowly. A man, screaming filth, swung a fence post at me; the same Negro who had stood in our front line until a rock in his stomach doubled him up, caught the fence post and tore it aside, and then I closed with the man and we went down with others on top, and it was very close quarters for striking, but I crawled out somehow, hearing a voice yelling,

"They're killing Fast, God damn it!"

They weren't killing me, but I lost my glasses there. I came out with my shirt in shreds and blood all over me, but already they were running and we had a brief taste of how good the offensive feels, even in our microcosmic nightmare of a war. And a few of us had enough presence of mind to shout,

"Hold back! Hold back! Get to the platform!"

We ran to the platform and linked arms once again—very tired now, very hurt—not one among us unhurt—and stood there, swaying a little, bleeding, but making a tight semi-circle with the women and children behind us. And the women and the girls, thinking that we were dealing with human kind cut out of the mold of human kind, began to sing the *Star Spangled Banner,* but the patriots of the burning cross had no respect for this particular song, and while the girls sang they picked up their courage and rushed us again, and again we beat them off.

At that point the lights went out. Someone had broken the line from the generator, and the sudden change accentuated the blackness of the night. While we fought, the lights went out, and then, when we had beaten them off, they seemed to go crazy in an utterly pointless frustration. They attacked the chairs. We couldn't see them, but through the blackness we heard them raging among the folding chairs, hurling them about, splintering and smashing them. It was not only senseless, it was sick—horrible and patho-

logical and sick, as so much of their behavior was that night.

Then one of them lit a fire about thirty yards from our semicircle around the platform. A chair went on the fire, then another and another, then a whole pile of chairs—chairs which did not belong to us but to the Peekskill businessman who owned the picnic grounds. Then they discovered our table of books and pamphlets, and then it was, that to crown our evening, there was re-enacted the monstrous performance of the Nuremberg book burning which had become a world symbol of fascism. Perhaps the nature of fascism is so precise, perhaps its results on human beings are so consistently diseased, that the same symbols must of necessity arise; for standing there, arms linked, we watched the Nuremberg memory come alive again. The fire roared up and the defenders of the "American" way of life seized piles of our books and danced around the blaze, flinging the books into the fire as they danced. We were half in the darkness but they were lit by the fire in such a manner as to suggest a well-set stage, where this dance, so symbolic of the death of civilization, was performed after careful rehearsal.

We watched that through and then the fire died down and darkness came again, and then, suddenly, up in the direction of the road, an army flare arched up into the sky made a balloon of bright light, hung there, and then swept slowly and gracefully to earth. The screaming died away. The shouting stopped. There was a terrible, wonderful new silence all around us in the darkness, and the silence lasted and lasted.

I looked at my watch. It was a quarter to ten.

And still silence, broken only by the half-hysterical sobbing of women and the whimpering cries of the little children—the children of four and five and six who had been brought early, so that they should miss no chance to hear Paul Robeson sing his warm songs.

And then a voice from the dark cried, "Hello—hello, there!" It was our scout, A—— K——, back from his third trip through.

"What happened?" we asked him.

"I don't know. I was watching them for a chance to slip

through, and suddenly they pulled out. It was whispered among them, and they pulled out—all of them. The meadow is empty."

"Where's the truck? Did you see it?"

"Yes, it got back to where you had the big fight, across the meadow, and there were two badly hurt fascists there so we put them in the truck along with our people, and the driver's trying to get through the roadblock to the hospital. I told him not to try, but he was afraid some of our kids would die, so he's going to try to get them to take down one of the roadblocks and let him through." K—— added, "He thinks maybe that because there are two of their people in the truck they'll let him through."

(I discovered afterwards that they would not let him through, whereupon he drove his truck in low gear over the rockpile barricade, made it, and literally smashed his way through them to the road and to a hospital. We did not see the driver or the truck again that night, but I had the story from him a week later.)

"What are those flares?"

"I don't know."

"And did you call Albany—the governor—the troopers—the police—the newspapers?"

"I've been calling since seven-thirty," K—— said. "I called them all three or four times. They know. They've known all night."

"You're sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. I spoke to the troopers myself. I gave them all the details—and they promised to come. But from the way they spoke, I'm sure they knew already."

"All right," I said, "all right. You've done a job. Take it easy now."

A few others held a conference then. It was not easy to sit there in the dark. Some of the women began to plead with us to let them go, to let them take their children out of there. The tension was at the breaking point. We had to be firm and sometimes harsh

with them, but we decided that no one would leave the platform until some civil or military force from the outside came through to us. We had survived on the basis of discipline and unity, and we were determined not to break that discipline and unity, come what might. There was one woman, I recall, whose husband had gone up the road with us just before the first fight began, and now he was missing, and she pleaded with me to let her go out into the dark and look for him. . . .

And then we saw a pair of headlights. Slowly, searchingly, the car drove down into the hollow and toward us, stopping only a few feet away. The car was a small coupe. Three men got out. They walked toward us, leaving the headlights of the car on to light their way.

A few feet from me they stopped, nodded at me, and stood there quietly for a moment. I recognized them now; they were the well-dressed men with the notebooks who had watched the fighting on the road up above and taken notes as they watched.

"You did all right," one of them said suddenly. "You did a damn good piece of work up there. I take my hat off. It was damned fine discipline all the way through."

"What in hell do you want?" I demanded. I was in no mood to be pleasant to anyone now.

"We thought we might help you out. You got some pretty badly hurt people, so if you want us to, we'll take a few of them to the hospital."

"Go to hell!" I said, but then one of our men was plucking my sleeve, and he pulled me back and whispered, "I know them. They're government men, justice agents. You can trust them."

"Why?"

"Because right now they got no stake in this either way. Didn't you see them earlier tonight. They're neutral. This is just a big experiment to them, and they're neutral. Some of the kids are bleeding badly and one may have a fractured skull. If they say they'll take them to a hospital, they will."

"How do you know them—how do you know who they are?" I pressed him.

"Because I been working in this county long enough to know. I've talked to them before, and I tell you they're Justice Department agents. Anyway, we got to take a chance because the kids are badly hurt."

I went back to the three agents who were standing calmly and quietly where I had left them. They were the calmest, most unruffled trio I had seen that night, and now they stood there with their hands in their pockets, looking at our circle of battered, weary men.

"How many can you take?" I asked them.

"Three."

"Can you get through?"

"Don't worry about that. We can get through, and we'll get your men to the hospital."

So I turned back to our line and said, "Look—we can take three of the worst hurt of you to the hospital. It's all right, and there's nothing to worry about. So if you think you're hurt pretty bad, step forward."

At first no one of them moved. They stayed where they were, looking silently at these three dapper, composed gentlemen. The first to break it was a young Negro. He let go of the men alongside of him and walked over to me. "What the hell," he said softly, swaying from side to side. There was blood over his face and the whole front of his shirt was soaked with blood. He bent his head and there were two cuts on the top, one a gash from forehead to ear, the other about two inches long. I nodded, and they helped him into their car.

A second Negro came forward now. He lifted his swollen, bleeding lip to show me the smashed, gaping cavity in his mouth. I nodded again and he joined the first man in the car. The third was a white youngster; there was something wrong with his shoulder. "I think it's broken," he said.

The three Justice men got back into the car, swung it around and drove off, and once again we were in the quiet darkness. I went back to the line and stood next to the others, wondering how men with broken shoulders and broken heads could go on fighting the way they had and not complain at all.

Now three more of the army flares went off, arching into the sky and filling it with white light, and then settling lazily down to earth. (I learned later from J—— N——, who passed by on the road up above at just about this time, but who did not know that we were down in the hollow, that the state troopers were using the flares to search the underbrush for bodies.)

None of that light reached us. Still in the darkness, we waited the minutes through, one after another; and then suddenly the silent scene in the hollow erupted into action and motion.

First an ambulance which came roaring down into the hollow, siren wide open and red headlights throwing a ghostly glare. Then car after car full of troopers and Westchester County police. All in a moment there were a dozen cars on the meadow in front of us, and the place was swarming with troopers and police. . . .

Properly, that should have been the end of it. Not that the police had come dashing to the rescue in the traditional "Jack Dalton" fashion; quite the contrary. We learned subsequently—and beyond any shadow of a doubt—that the police and troopers had been aware of the events at the picnic grounds for hours and had been in easy reach, but had been deliberately withheld so that the tragedy might run its course, and only when it became fully evident that the carefully-planned mass lynching would be frustrated, did they decide to enter the picture; yet in spite of this we considered that now there would be some surcease, some letup.

Not yet; one more chapter in that night of horror had to be played through, and it began with an officer of the troopers who stalked up to us and demanded,

"Who in hell is running this show?"

"It's over," I said to myself. "They talk like that because that's

a cop's nature, but it's over." And then I told him that he could talk to me.

"Who in hell are you?"

"My name's Fast—Howard Fast," I answered, gritting my teeth. Now the line had broken; our discipline broke for the first time that evening, and the people crowded around the trooper and me —and then they were thrust back by other troopers, and the one who was speaking to me snarled,

"Damn it, keep them in their places, sitting down!"

"Sit down!" another trooper shouted. "All of you, sit down. Nobody moves!"

"What's this all about?" I asked the trooper officer. "Are you going to take us out of here or not?"

"I'll ask the questions."

"Look—we've had a tough time here."

"You'll have a tougher time if you don't God damn well do as we say. Who are you anyway?"

I told him I was the chairman of the concert that never took place.

"Who's running it?"

"They never got here."

"Are you in charge?"

"As much as anyone, I guess."

"All right," he said. "You keep these people where they are. If anyone moves, if anyone tries to get away from here, there'll be trouble. Understand?"

"We've got little children here. Don't you understand what we've been through tonight?"

"You're looking for trouble, aren't you?" the trooper said.

"I'm not looking for any trouble, trooper. We've had enough trouble. We want to get out of here."

"Just do as I say and keep them in their places or there'll be hell to pay."

So I went through the crowd and along the line and told them

that. "A little longer," I told them. "We stuck it out until now, so we can stick it out a little longer, I guess. Just take it easy."

In a way that was the hardest part of the evening. Not so much the sitting there with a dozen state troopers stationed in front of us, legs spread, fingering their clubs—but to stay there after I learned what was behind it. And that was soon enough.

They let me walk around, and one of the Westchester police was willing to talk. Briefly, he told me that one of the fascists—William Secor, his name turned out to be—had been knifed and had been taken to the hospital, and a rumor had just come through that he had died. I often thought that it was only on the basis of this rumor that the police had entered the hollow at all, but I have no proof of that. In any case, if Secor was dead, every one of us who had held the road against the attacks would face a murder charge. That was why we were being kept here this way—so that they could get a report from the hospital and if necessary pull us in on a murder rap.

(There was no knife among our men. Later, it was proved that Secor had been knifed by one of his own gang in the drunken frenzy of their attack.)

I went back to our people. "I don't understand it," I said. "There were no knives in our group."

"They had knives, plenty of them."

"Can they make a murder rap stick?"

"If they want to hard enough—I guess they can frame anything."

"After what happened tonight, can they try forty of us for murder?"

"They can if they want to, and they can get a conviction if they want to. They set this up, didn't they?"

I didn't want to believe it. Here we were alive. All evening we had fought against the most monstrous and inconceivable mass lynching ever attempted in the northern states of America, not simply a riot or a mob demonstration, but a calculated attack to kill

two hundred people, and because we had kept our heads and kept our courage, we had frustrated it; and now we were alive when no one of us had had any real expectations of emerging alive; and now the police were here and the state troopers and all the fine legal protection that an American citizen comes to expect as his right, his lawful right in a democratic republic—and now we were being held so that a charge of murder could be brought against us, so that we could be framed into a great mass spectacle for the type of animal who had planned and executed the business of the night.

It was hard to believe then, but it is not hard to believe now. The "monstrous" has become the accepted pattern of life, and frameup runs like a thread through the lives of all progressive Americans today, and the gibbering, conscienceless stools sit in the witness chairs all over the land, and their lies drop like spittle from the mouths of idiots; but it was newer then and the blood was not dry on us yet from the fight we had been through, and it was, therefore, the harder to believe and accept.

There were twenty minutes then, and each minute was long and full of hurt, and I stood there waiting and thinking and trying to relate that night to all I had read and heard of Germany, and to tell myself, "This is how it happens, and all over the land people sleep and they don't know and don't particularly care. But it happens this way because decent people cannot learn from watching it happen somewhere else, and because the workers are fed the wormy crust of anti-Communism, and because the sell-out is the new god of the land, and because somewhere a great horror is in the making and it is necessary to instill terror, so that we may accept horror as the pattern of our lives. . . .

Cars were coming back and forth now, and the hollow was alive with action and with blue uniforms and with gray uniforms, and the fine, jack-booted palace guards of Thomas E. Dewey were strutting all over the place, showing their slim waists and handsome profiles, and there was a conference taking place too among

the big brass of the little army which had descended upon us; and then the local Westchester cop, the one with a core of something human left inside of him—a small town cop from a small town nearby—nodded at me, and I went over to him and he whispered,

"It's all right now. This guy isn't going to kick in. In fact, he just got a little bit of a cut in the belly and they don't know who cut him, so you can stop worrying."

I went back and spread the news around and we began to smile a little. There was a sudden change in the attitude of the state troopers; they became courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, just as the book says they are, those fine gray guardians of the law and the people of the sovereign state of New York, and the big brass of them came over to me and put his hand on my shoulder, nice and warm and friendly, and said,

"Look, Fast, what we want now is to get your people out of here, and we're going to get them out so that not a hair on anyone's head is harmed, and I guess you've had a tough night of it, but it's over now and you can just stop worrying. Now I want you to separate them into groups according to the town or place or resort they came from, and my troopers will drive them home in our own cars."

(I wonder what order had come through then? From the murder rap to this, but perhaps Albany began to realize the quantity of the lousy smell arising from that hollow near Peekskill.)

I did as he said. Our people were tired and worn, but their spirits were not broken. The women were very good and very patient, and the little children began to doze now in the arms of their mothers. The first part of the nightmare of Peekskill was approaching its finish.

Things moved quickly after that, and we were shown how efficient the state police could be when they had orders to be cooperative and efficient. Car after car was loaded and driven away. In less than an hour the hollow was cleared and the men and women and children who had lived through that first horror of Peekskill were either at home or on their way home.

At the end a handful of troopers remained, myself, a Negro woman, the wife of an old friend of mine, and two white women. Since they were all three bound for Croton, they had waited for me; and I asked the troopers to stand by until I discovered whether my car was all right.

It was—and incidentally one of the few cars there that night which was not smashed beyond any hope of repair. We got into the car and drove out. I had to drive slowly since my glasses were gone, but I managed all right, and in a little while the women were home.

(It is worth noting that as we drove out of the picnic grounds, troopers were beating the underbrush for bodies; for reports of missing people had come in from all over Westchester—missing people on our side. Also, as we drove out, I saw for the first time the crazy wreckage of smashed cars along the road, and realized that those who had come to the concert and been turned away had not escaped unscathed.)

It was past midnight when I reached home and put my car in the garage and went into the house. Mrs. M—— was still awake; the phone had been ringing all night, with constant inquiries about me —where I was, whether I was alive or dead. Mrs. M—— didn't say much, only,

"Thank God, you're alive."

She didn't ask me what had happened; through the night the telephone had given her a good idea of what had happened, and the only inquiry she made was about Paul Robeson.

"I think he's all right," I said. "I don't know yet."

(It turned out that his car had not been able to come within a mile of the picnic grounds, and that he was safe.)

Mrs. M—— looked at me, at my blood-caked shirt, at the blood on my face and hands. Then she said good-night suddenly and went up to bed. It was not pleasant to be a Negro in the Hudson River Valley that night.

I poured a drink of whisky but I couldn't touch it. I sat for a

while at the kitchen table, looking at the drink, tried to taste it again but couldn't. The phone rang.

It was J—— N——, and I was a little surprised at the relief in his voice when he heard mine. He told me of his own adventures that evening, how he had been with my friend, the Negro whose wife had left the picnic grounds in my car, and how they had gone out to see if they could find the bodies at least, how they had called the hospitals nearby and located eight of our people in hospitals but were unable to get the names of all of them, how they drove past the picnic grounds when the fascists were pouring out—by some prearranged agreement, I suppose, with the authorities —and how since all was dark below, they concluded that we were gone, and how they had gone back once again, after we were out.

I was still wrapped in the awful isolation of our fight on the road and in the hollow, our separation from the world of reasonable, civilized human beings. I asked him whether people knew of what had happened in Peekskill.

"The whole world knows," he answered.

But still it didn't seem possible. I went upstairs and looked at the children. The night light was on in my daughter's room, and she opened her eyes when I came in and smiled at me and said, "Hullo, Daddy," and then went back to sleep.

I took my clothes off and got into a steaming hot shower.

"Well, it's done," I said to myself, "tonight is over. Whatever else happens, tonight is over, and I'm through with Peekskill. Let them build a bridge over it."

I was very tired, and all I wanted was to get to sleep.

Part Three

Reaction on Sunday

THE PHONE RANG AT about eight o'clock the following morning, and I listened sleepily while one of the Mohegan Colony survivors of the night before told me that there would be a meeting on the lawn of his home at ten o'clock, and would I be there?

"I'll be there," I said.

Rachel and Johnny were having their breakfast; the sun was shining; all was all right with the world, and what had happened the evening before was a bad dream. Bad dreams fade and become vague and unrecognizable; it was utterly and completely impossible that in this sunny, placid world of pretty houses and pleasant people and gentle summertime such a thing as I had witnessed could have been. It could have been elsewhere; it could have been in Hitler's Germany; it could not have been here. This was the America I had known and loved and written of with reverence and affection, and even the cuts and a swollen wrist were impossible contradictions in a sunny world of normalcy.

Mrs. M—— said little; this was an old trouble for her people, and deep inside of her, and even though she knew so little of the night before—only confused, fragmentary bits—it was perhaps more real to her than it was to me.

When I said that I was taking Rachel with me, she asked, "Will there be more trouble?"

"Not today. Would I take her with me if there was going to be more trouble?"

"You wanted to take her last night."

"Nobody could have anticipated last night," I protested. "Last night was something that doesn't happen and can't happen."

"But it happened."

What had happened, and when and how? Rachel and I drove up to Mohegan Colony. She was wearing a pink sunsuit as a little girl should in the pleasant summertime, and I kept thinking, what had happened? And why? We drove over the same roads I had taken the night before, through the same little valleys, and Rachel chattered in her most charming and disconnected manner of a dozen different things. Had Paul sung well? And what had Paul sung? Did he pick little girls up in his arms when he sang? Her talk was full of Peekskill, her own Peekskill. Peekskill meant that Paul Robeson, who was so tall and grand, was singing his songs somewhere.

We came to Mohegan and already there were twenty-five or thirty people present, sitting on the lawn and talking of what had happened a few hours ago—but seemingly a thousand years ago. Here was a representative group of summer and year-round residents of Mohegan, Shrub Oak, Peekskill, Croton, Yorktown and many other villages in the vicinity, professionals and small business men. Here were also some of the workers who had been with me the night before, some of the young people whose lives were being threaded with fascism from the very beginning, and here were some of the women and some of the children too of last night. They sat on this lovely lawn with banks of flowers behind them, and I joined them and listened to them talk. Rachel had taken off her shoes and was racing over the lawn, trying to catch a kitten.

Their talk was uneasy and troubled. They were trying to understand what had happened, what had changed, what was the

meaning of the evening before. A pervading difference had come to the place; they had to know what that difference was. Also, they were frightened; and that was most understandable, for fear came in direct proportion to recollection of the details at the picnic grounds. I guess I listened for almost an hour, trying to comprehend how it must have felt to them. Here were their homes, not mine. They were people in very modest circumstances, yet all I had to do was look around me to see what love and care and patience had been put into these places where they lived. Yet I think they sensed, all of them, that something had started which would never stop if they retreated. Mingled with all the other horror of the evening before was a stink of burning flesh, a smell of gas chambers and abattoirs, a memory of horror thrust aside, another world not ours. Small memories intruded. There had been in the ACA galleries in New York City some months before, an exhibition of undistinguished, greenish cakes of soap. They happened to have been made in Germany of human fat and ashes, otherwise they were soap. The pervadingly normal was off balance. The newspapers would write considered editorials warning that such excesses as those at Peekskill, while commendable in purpose and understandable in the light of communist actions, etcetera and ad nauseum, were nevertheless not the "American way" to handle such matters, better left to J. Edgar Hoover and Company; but not sufficiently would such editorials erase. It is hard to convince decent and good and moral people that they are indecent and bad and immoral; the world of normalcy and reason was wobbling off balance, ready to tip. But when you are underneath you have to be brave. The men and women knew that, but heroic action simply does not arise as *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer* would have you believe.

They asked me what I thought. I was very close to a number of them, in that peculiar closeness which is the result of a struggle in common against death. "I think we have to hold a meeting today," I said. "We can't give in to this thing. Even if on a small scale, we have to do it again today and maybe tomorrow and maybe

the next day, otherwise we'll have to creep away somewhere and find a deep and dark hole for ourselves."

Many of them had been thinking that too, but it was hard to say and harder to perform. The workers there agreed with me, but like me, they had less to lose than the folk who were rooted here with home and children. Person after person took the floor. Every objection was raised and eventually disposed of. We had no means of organizing a meeting of consequence in a few hours. Where would it be? Who would give us space? Who would take a chance on a repeat performance?

I went into the house and phoned a friend of mine, a resident of Mt. Kisco, a very brave and principled woman who has a beautiful summer place there, a small house, but with a great stretch of green lawn all around it, room enough for ten thousand people if necessary. She was home, and she knew about the night before.

"How much do you know about it?"

"I know that it was unspeakable," she said.

"It was. It was pretty terrible. I want you to know exactly how awful it was, because a group of us are having a meeting up at Mohegan right now. We've decided to hold a protest meeting today and we need a place, and—well, I'm asking for your place."

There was a long silence. Then she said, "How many people do you think?"

"I have no idea. Maybe a hundred—maybe five hundred. We haven't time to do anything except make phone calls and let it get around that way."

"At what time?"

"At three o'clock," I said.

"It's eleven now. Can you do it in four hours?"

"I don't know. But if you let us have your place we can try."

"Let me talk to my husband," she said. I held the phone for a minute or two, and then she was back and told me, "All right." She wasn't happy about it. "Don't think we're not scared," she said. "It's just the inconvenience of having to live with ourselves."

I went back and told them that we had a place. A local trade union organizer was already laying plans for spreading word of the meeting. Westchester was broken down, village by village, area by area, with one volunteer after another taking the responsibility for a town or an area. Two of the performers from People's Artists were there, and they said they would sing. We would get some of the local Labor Party leadership to speak. We would have some kind of meeting in any case.

The trade union man turned to me and said, "Fast—would it be all right if we asked you to organize the defense?"

Would it be all right? After a decade of writing speeches, delivering them; after more than a bellyful of the literary life, it was not only all right but a singular honor. "It will be a pleasure," I said.

"What do you need?"

"I need thirty of the toughest, hardest workers you can find in Westchester, and I want them at my house in Croton at two o'clock."

"They'll be there." he said.

A few minutes later we broke up and drove away. I took Rachel home and we had lunch, and an hour later the first two carloads of workers drove up. When the bulk of them had arrived, we drove to Mt. Kisco and I set up the security system, first on the main road, then on the side road to the place, and then on the entrance to the place itself. Now a dozen state troopers were on hand; but we had no assurance of which side they were on, and we made adequate preparations of our own. As it happened, the meeting went off smoothly, and the single attempt at attack by a dozen young hoodlums from Peekskill was easily driven off.

(Apparently I was not the only one who realized about then that fascist attacks upon the progressive movement, unless backed by the armed force of the state apparatus, could be easily repulsed or contained. The fact that this was realized and accepted, not only by progressives but by the Westchester County and New York

State Government, accounts for the subsequent blood-bath which is better known to the world as the *Peekskill Affair* than our first isolated defense of the hollow at the picnic grounds. I will deal with that later; and I mention it now only to explain the ease with which our small but organized defense drove off the single attack at Mt. Kisco.)

The Mt. Kisco place was on a hilltop, with a fine command of the countryside for miles in every direction. At a place where the lawn sloped down and away from the house, we set up a table as a speaker's stand. As we had no chairs, we decided that the people who came—still wondering if any would come—would sit on the lawn, and since the lawn was on a hillside, the speakers would be visible to everyone. We hopefully set aside two acres as a parking lot, with two youngsters in charge of parking arrangements; and then we waited.

You must remember that those of us directly concerned were still unaware of the impact of *Peekskill* on the outside world. We had not seen the newspapers, nor had we any opportunity of listening to the radio. Fighting, sleeping, and arranging this meeting had occupied every minute of our time. Therefore we could not estimate what the results of our call to the decent people of Westchester to rally here would be. In every case, in this and in later instances, we underestimated.

The cars began to arrive shortly after three o'clock—a single car, a few more, a few more, and then steadily—and then a sudden jam of cars as far down the road as we could see, hundreds and hundreds of cars.

More than sixteen hundred people came to that meeting, which had been called on a few hours' notice, which was in a fairly isolated part of Westchester, hard to find, hard to get to—yet better than sixteen hundred people came. I think that there and then I began to understand that *Peekskill* was something more than a personal nightmare, that it was the first tangible sign of a ferment, of the making of hell on earth for the people of the United States

and for the people of other lands too—but more than that, for out of *Peekskill,* now and later, there was to be action and reaction, a testing of fascism (made in USA) and a testing of the forces of anti-fascism.

Cold and sober and angry were the people who came to Mt. Kisco. We had no sound apparatus, so they packed around the table, a sea of faces on the sloping lawn, listening to the story of what had happened before, listening to an itemization of how every official force in the vicinity, the district attorney, the local police, the state troopers, had so conducted themselves as to make mass murder a practical possibility. They heard the tale of the fight on the road and in the hollow, and of the attempted frameup on the murder count. And to all they listened soberly and coldly.

At this meeting, the *Westchester Committee for Law and Order* came into existence and proposed that Paul Robeson be invited to sing at Peekskill again.

Then we sang *We Shall Not Be Moved,* passed several resolutions on the incident, and the second day of *Peekskill* was over.

Of Mt. Kisco, there is only this to add. The people who gave us their home and lawns for that meeting cannot be too highly praised. They had much to lose, and since then they have suffered a good deal for it. The brave voices of anonymity call them constantly on the phone, mixing filth and threats, as do the writers of anonymity with their dirty little postcards. Terror paid them a lasting call. But their act was a confirmation of faith in the presence of many thousands of good, honest people like them in these United States.

Part Four

The Picnic Grounds

MONDAY MORNING, I went back to my essay on literature and reality. A good many years before this I had decided that the only solution to my personal problem as a writer was to allow nothing—where humanly possible—to interfere with the daily practice of writing. I have never known the gentle and reflective conditions which—it still seems to me—the act of literary creation in any full sense requires. Nevertheless, I have managed a good deal of writing under less than the best circumstances, and it was in this spirit that I tackled the essay. I remember that I was going through Emerson then, looking for the particular piece of his in which he speaks of the theory of books as noble; and being unable to find it, I had asked J—— N—— to lend me his collection of Emerson. I was wondering this morning whether he would recall my request at this point, when I saw his car through the window. The interruption was particularly welcome, for my critical approach to questions of literature and reality had badly bogged down in a memory of screaming men dancing around a fire of burning chairs, into which they tossed malignant objects known as books.

I went downstairs and thanked him for the book.

"What are you doing now?" he asked.

"Trying to write."

"My own assignment is this *Peekskill* business. I've got to do a series of pieces on it, so I thought a good start would be to have a look at the battlefield in quiet and daylight. Do you want to come?"

I had never liked cold battlefields and had seen enough of them, but this was the first one on which I had lost thirty dollars worth of eye glasses. "Sure I'll come," I agreed.

J——'s son and daughter, both of them teen-agers, were in the car, and they reported on the state of the young people in the neighborhood as we drove up to the Lakeland Picnic Grounds. Most of the local boys and girls who had been up on the state road during that night of horror were a little frightened now, a little ashamed of what had happened. They had not known it would be like that. But others were not ashamed and were eager for more. J——, on the other hand, had been making a tour of bars and lunch rooms in Peekskill and Verplanck, the latter a physically and morally decaying river port which had contributed a large percentage of the *lumpen* element to the attack; and his impression was of a tight and controlled silence. No one wanted to say that they had been present; nobody wanted to say what had happened from their own particular point of view. The situation was a new one, and there was something filthy, something morally decadent, if one can place such a construction upon it, in the whole neighborhood. What had come to the surface that night had been festering for years, a fungus growth overlaid by the surface aspect of a reasonably respectable and orderly community, but there nevertheless. . . . At least that was how J—— N——saw it, and subsequent investigations directed toward social factors involved bore out his conclusions.

When we arrived at Lakeland we parked the car across the road, leaving the boy and girl to watch it while we went into the picnic grounds. On this morning the place was deserted, quiet, peaceful—almost a testimony to the incredible character of the events of Saturday night. We walked past wrecked cars however—

still there—and examined the length of fence torn up and used as weapons by the fascists. We went down to the grounds and I looked through the grass where the big fight had taken place, but without finding my glasses. We poked through the ashes of the fire where the books had been burned and counted around it no less than forty used flashlight bulbs. That meant that at least forty pictures had been taken of the book-burning and of the insane demonstration which had accompanied it. But I do not recall having seen even one picture of the incident published anywhere—that is, of the book-burning incident. What happened to those pictures? Have the plates been destroyed, or will they emerge some day as a silent witness to the infamous beginnings of American fascism?

Up the slope from the hollow, toward the road, we found the remains of the fiery cross; and then, swinging toward the gulley and the embankment which we had chosen for defense, we found a great many empty liquor bottles, some thrown aside, some carefully broken to be used for weapons.

But for the scene of a crime, an unbelievably despicable crime, the place was curiously deserted. It was an attempt which had failed, and thereby to be quickly forgotten. A small and inconsequential incident on the banks of the Hudson River.

Part Five

The Golden Gate

BUT *PEEKSKILL* WOULD not remain forgotten. At best, we Americans are a remarkably insular folk, and a taste of the country adds to that. All's right with the world in the lovely fields and woods of our eastern country; nature created this properly, and what is illogical and insane penetrates with difficulty. I took the children swimming on Monday afternoon, and once again the world was at peace. I dwell on this because it was part and parcel of the amazing resistance the ordinary people of our land display toward the acceptance of an unmistakable phenomenon—the cultivation and growth of American fascism. We simply do not believe it. We no longer seem to be politically aware people. We live in a variety of small worlds, and while some of this is good, most of it is not good; for it wraps around us an incredible mantle of indifference, and this very indifference promotes our indifference toward what the men and the women of the whole world are coming to think of us. "It can't happen here" is still deeply embedded in our conscience, and that salves us. When we do not hear the cries of the dying children in Korea, those of us with scruples explain it by saying that Korea is far away; but the truth is that we make our own measure of distance, and we hear precisely what we want to hear.

I went swimming with my children, and *Peekskill* had faded into the place of dreams, where all things lack reality. This had

happened before and it would happen again. But the fires lit by those burning books are not easily extinguished.

A few minutes after we returned to the house that afternoon, the telephone rang. It was Bill Patterson of the Civil Rights Congress, that brave and tireless leader of almost every struggle for civil rights, calling from New York. "How are you feeling?" he asked.

"I'm feeling fine. I've just been swimming."

"Well, dry yourself and come into New York tomorrow. We're having a big mass meeting at the Golden Gate to protest this damned *Peekskill* business."

"Is there that much interest in it?"

"That much interest? For God's sake, man, this is a world event of paramount importance. Do you know what a mass, organized attempt to lynch Paul Robeson means? Do you know what a mass, organized attempt to murder two hundred people means? Haven't you seen the newspapers?"

"I thought I knew what it meant," I said. "But it's true that I haven't seen the papers."

"Well, look at them."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Be one of the speakers."

I said, "All right. I'll be there." But I had no idea of the significance of his words until I arrived at the Golden Gate Ballroom in Harlem on the following day.

The Golden Gate Ballroom, at 140th Street and Lenox Avenue, is, I imagine, the largest public auditorium in Harlem. At full capacity it will hold perhaps a little better than five thousand people, and this Tuesday night it was more than capacity. I parked my car a block away, but around the front of the Golden Gate was a massed crowd of Negroes, solid in front and spilling well onto Lenox Avenue, solid on the corners and spilling down each side street and across each side street. How many there were outside, I don't know; but I would think at the very least three

thousand and possibly as many as six thousand. It is hard to estimate a crowd like that—but at the very least, three thousand. And most curiously, no police in sight.

You would have to know the situation in Harlem at that time to understand the full significance of such a crowd with no police in attendance. You would have to recall the year-long series of police brutalities in Harlem, the beatings and killings upon the slightest provocation or upon no provocation at all; and you would have to take into consideration the fact that in the course of that year, from the summer of '48 to the summer of '49, Harlem had been turned, in many respects, into an armed camp, a place of military occupation by the New York City police force, to appreciate the extraordinary effect of such a crowd without police in attendance. (I should say, without police in sight.)

Well, there it was, and I had to get into the hall somehow; so I pushed and wriggled and slid and managed to make my way through. It was an orderly crowd, but it was a bitter crowd; it was an ominous, angry crowd, coldly disciplined with that kind of cold anger which is very certain and very deep-seated. It was that kind of a crowd, practically all Negro, which I pushed through until I was in a confined, enclosed, half-circle of space left directly in front of the entrance. And there were the police, almost a hundred of them, caught between the crowd inside and the crowd outside, the guest who came and stayed—there they were.

Oh, that was something to see, almost a hundred New York City cops in a spot like that—indeed, that was something to see. I have never seen the like of it before in New York, nor since, such quiet cops, such genteel cops, such silent cops, each one of them standing quietly and politely right in his place, eyes on the ground, nightstick clasped unostentatiously, their whole attitude being, "Just don't you dare notice us at all, because we're just here because we have to be here, duty and all that, you know; but after all, New York's finest, and who else takes children across the street or finds them when they're lost?" Yes, that was something; and I

could only think of the French police when the working class of France comes out in all its mighty power—and at such times the French police assigned to cover the demonstration stand very still, eyes on the ground, neutral in the best tradition. . . .

Well, when I got into that open space I realized that two huge mass meetings were going on at once. A low rumble of sound came from within the hall, and out here another speaker's stand had been set up, with an outdoor meeting going on, and with never a bit of interference or objection from those trapped cops, never an attempt on the part of six or seven of them to open a man's skull with their clubs—as I have seen more times than I can count—never a boot in a worker's groin when they are six to one or ten to one, and never a woman dragged by her hair, but just polite observation. People say so glibly that you can't change human nature; and I wish such people could have been there that night and seen how three or four thousand angry Negroes changed the nature of a large number of New York City police. And if you can change a cop's nature, I insist there is no limit to what you can do with human nature. . . .

Once in there, I was spotted by the friend whose wife had been in the last car to go out of the picnic grounds. When I told him that I had never seen its like before, including the cops, he answered.

"They don't like to think that Paul Robeson could have died up there. This is the way they feel about that."

Ben Davis was speaking to the crowd on the street then. "Let them touch a hair of Paul Robeson's head," he cried bitterly, "and they'll pay a price they never calculated!"

A low roar; it was not a loud crowd; the noise was a throaty, deep one.

I spoke after Ben Davis, and then we went inside. The Golden Gate was packed with all it could hold. Now it began to sink in, what *Peekskill* was and what *Peekskill* meant. Now I knew something of what this towering, incredible man, who in a way was

bigger and stronger and prouder than any other man I have ever known, meant to his own people. The whole world had momentarily focused its attention on our wild, hopeless little battle in the hollow; but for these people the vileness—that specific and stinking vileness which has sent the stench of American lynching into every corner of the earth—was directed against the one great man who had broken through their bonds and bondage, who would not be jimcrowed, who would not hang his head, who would not crawl and who would not be bought off, not with dollars and not with cheap handouts from a cheapened and bloodstained government.

He came into the hall then, and the noise was fused into a somber, angry meaning. He came in very proud and very troubled; and though I had seen him before in so many places in all the years our paths had crossed, I had never seen him like this, so proud and so troubled, with the whole face of the future bare to him, waiting and challenging.

It was very hot there on that hot summer evening, and the manner in which that old, gilded ballroom was packed with humanity did not lessen the heat. Men sat in their shirtsleeves, but the sweat ran off them, and the heat hung like a heavy cloud under the ceiling. But no one rose to go, and one after another, people spoke of *Peekskill,* of what had happened on Saturday night, of the meaning inherent in it. You could not watch that crowd of serious, troubled faces—faces of people who had known little else than trouble—and not understand that something new was in the making here. It was a bitter coming of age. "You have harrassed our people so long, and now you go against this man whom we love and honor, because he is such proof of our seed of greatness."

I had read the papers by now. How does one write of such things? It is said that every man's gorge has a point of eruption, a moment when his stomach empties itself out of nausea and disgust; but there is no such point for the men who write in our "great" newspapers. The *New York Times* "regretted" that such

un-American doings had occurred. The *New York Herald Tribune* added that such displays of vulgarity were "understandable," for all that they might be deplored. It is *so* wrong to make martyrs of these Reds, since it is precisely what they want. Contempt for Robeson; more contempt for Howard Fast. There is a better way to do these things, the *New York Times* sighed. But the obvious rags, the *News* and *Mirror* and *Journal,* howled with glee—here it is, and you can bet we'll do better than Adolf ever did; and of reaction's press, only the social democratic *New York Post* showed a tremor of fear, a reluctant knowledge that for every Communist who dies in this particular *auto da fé,* there are a hundred "sincere" anti-communists who also go into the flames. All this I thought of as I spoke to those troubled, upturned faces, and again as I heard Robeson speak.

It is better than a year later now, and the conscience—if so it can be called—of the *New York Post* is dead, and also dead is any reluctance of the *New York Times* to embrace that fifth horseman of the Apocalypse whose name is fascism. Fascism, we have come to know, sits easily with the big buck, and a government with a dollar in one hand and a gun in the other can produce a remarkable silence within its own population; but those people who sat in the Golden Gate that night had a less than intimate acquaintance with the dollar, and as for the gun, it had never been turned away from them. They did not read the editorials in the *Times* too carefully, so they did not fully comprehend that Paul Robeson was a willing "tool" of Moscow, "duped" by the Communists, and that he had given up a vast income, gold-plated glory, and the approval of those same editorial writers in order to be pulled by the ears into some "foreign" conspiracy and risk his life and face prison and death, and know never a moment free from the threat of Mr. Hoover's gestapo, all because—(Well, even insanity in editorials has its limits, and how can you argue ethics or morality with those who have no ethics and no morality either.)—because he is a "tool," and wants to be a "tool," and isn't it nice to be a "tool?"

"Yes, I will sing wherever the people want to hear me," he said. "I sing of peace and freedom and of life!"

I have seen Harry Truman speak, and heard him too, for what it was worth, but I never saw tears pour from the eyes of those who listened, and I never saw love on their faces. . .

When the meeting was over, finally, the people poured out of the hall. The crowd outside had increased, and now the whole joined throng flurried and swept the police away. It swept them away without violence, but swept them away, and then turned into the avenue and formed ranks, and suddenly there was a massive parade marching down Lenox Avenue. Now the horse cops had come up, the "great" ones on their chestnut-colored steeds, but they would not stop this tonight and they too were swept out of the way and the huge concourse of people marched on down Lenox Avenue. . . .

It was late when I returned to Croton, and later still before I could fall asleep. There are a great many—some ignorant, some shrewd—who will tell you that there are no classes and no class struggle in America, and they are by and large cut out of the same cloth as those who insist that the Negro is perfectly free in this "most free" of all lands and that there is no oppression whatsoever in the home of the washing machine and the refrigerator. Thereby, *Peekskill* was the work of a few hoodlums expressing somewhat "excessive" resentment against "un-American" elements, although no one has fully explained why Americanism, or what passes under that title these days, always attracts to itself the filthiest, rottenest elements in the land, the jack-booted pimps and perverts who glory in the brass knucks and a chance to kick a woman in the stomach.

I was beginning to break through the remains of any such illusions. *Peekskill* did not just happen; it was not by the merest chance that the state and county police remained aloof until an opportunity arose to pin a framed murder rap on us; this was not the local doings of the local *lumpen,* and the FBI agents did not just happen to be out for an evening stroll in the Hudson River Valley.

The three sheriffs did not suddenly contract amnesia and stroll off at precisely the right moment, and the whole matter was by no means a spontaneous outbreak of local filth. After that evening at Golden Gate, I was able to see many more pieces of the puzzle than I had been able to see before. There was the Negro liberation movement, and there was Paul Robeson; and in that first attack there was no way for the fascists to know that Paul Robeson was not already within the picnic grounds. There was a plan somewhere for the imposition of a police state in America—a plan brought to fulfillment at the time of this writing—and certain aspects of the matter had to be tested. Piece after piece became clear, but still too many were missing for me to have the whole picture.

Most horribly, the remaining pieces were finally added a few days later.

Part Six

The Second Night of Terror

IT WAS REWARDING TO read in the *New York Compass* that Governor Dewey had requested District Attorney Fanelli of Westchester County to submit a full report on what had happened at Peekskill. The district attorney stated "that he didn't know anything about the disorders but was sure that the concert-goers—and not the veterans or the hoodlums who attacked them—were responsible." The governor had discharged his duty. All was well and would be well in the state of New York. And one must not be harsh on the little governor, for a new *common law* was coming into being—already upheld by the courts—to the effect that the murder of a Communist or a reasonable facsimile of a Communist not only was not a capital crime but was in a sense no crime at all.

"We're going to have the concert after all," I told Mrs. M——, "and Paul will sing." This was on Thursday.

"When?"

"On Sunday afternoon."

"I think he should sing if he wants to," Mrs. M—— said quietly. "I think anyone who wants to should."

"I should have mentioned that I'll be the chairman again."

"That can be a troublesome habit. You were once. Isn't that enough?"

"That's why. We set out to hold a concert, and now we're going to hold it. You can't run away from this kind of thing."

"Maybe you can't. But Rachel and Johnny and I can, and we're not going to stay here through another *Peekskill.*"

"It won't be another *Peekskill.*"

"You got a lot to learn, Mr. Fast," she said. "You know a lot about a lot of things, but I know more than you do about white folks and how they behave."

"What do you mean—white folks?"

"You know what I mean," she said, and the next day she began to pack. I didn't argue with her, and I was relieved that the children would be back in the city. We drove back Saturday morning, opened the house, and refurbished the refrigerator. Then I called B—— R——, a good friend and a Lincoln Brigade veteran. I asked him whether he wouldn't like to ride back to Croton and come along with me to the concert.

"I'll be down in half an hour," he said.

We drove back to Croton together that evening, and before we got there, I listened to a long lecture by R—— on common sense caution. "No one is dead yet," I pointed out.

"That's just the point," R—— said. "In your own way, you're just as blind as your middle class friends who insist that there is no fascism in America and will be none."

"I'm ready to admit it's in the making. God knows I should. But no one's out to kill me."

"Why not?"

"Because it's B picture cloak and dagger nonsense. It would serve no useful purpose, and when the FBI decides to be rid of me, it will do it nicely and legally."

"Because you keep thinking in terms of the FBI. But when the trumpets sound this kind of song, all the lice crawl out—and they crawl out to kill because fascism is the way of death and there's no holding it back once it's loose. I know. I was in Spain, and I saw those bastards operate in Spain."

"You're exaggerating," I argued, "and you will see tomorrow that we'll have no trouble at all. These lice, as you call them, don't like firmness, and this is a question of firmness."

"We'll see tomorrow," he agreed.

Before we went to the house, we stopped off at the N——'s and had tea with J—— and his lovely wife. I put the question R—— had raised to J—— N—— and asked him what his opinion was.

"I think we'll have trouble, but I also think we'll be in shape to handle it. There has been a call for trade unionists to protect the meeting, and I imagine we'll get a good response. On the other hand, the Peekskill gang has sent out a call for thirty thousand veterans, and every radio station in New York State has picked that up and broadcast it all day—just to help out—and it's no secret that this kind of a call means violence. My own guess is that three thousand is closer to what they'll get, but even three thousand can mean lots of trouble." (As a matter of fact, only a thousand or so hoodlums and thugs turned up the next day. It is anyone's guess how many of them were veterans.)

"What about the neighborhood?"

"This is a funny neighborhood," J—— said. "You know, there's no real industry here except the railroad, and the kids grow up in these river towns with no jobs and no future—just a rotten, perverted petty-bourgeois outlook. They get a job at a gas station or a grocery store or a lunch wagon or with the fire department or some other political handout—or they don't work and just scrounge around and live off the few dollars they pick up. They get twisted with bitterness, and they don't know what causes it or where to direct it. Then they hate, and it's easy for the Legion and the local Chamber of Commerce to use that hate. They're using it now. The Legion announced they would parade in front of our concert tomorrow, and we tried to get an injunction to stop the parade, but it seems that a lot of big operators want this thing to proceed according to plan. Also, there have been threats against people living here on the hill, so keep an eye cocked tonight."

"What time are you going to leave tomorrow?"

"Eight in the morning. How about breakfast here?"

"Isn't that early?" (The concert was scheduled to begin at two o'clock in the afternoon.)

"This time I want to get in," J—— smiled.

We agreed to meet at his house at seven-thirty, and then we left. It was a short ride to my house, and it was an uneasy feeling to be in the place, so dark and empty. Before we turned in, R—— switched off all the lights. Then we stood quietly in the living-room, listening.

"I feel extraordinarily foolish," I whispered.

"Nobody ever died of feeling foolish."

"What do you expect?"

"I wouldn't be standing here like this if I knew what to expect. I'm standing here like this because I don't know what to expect. But if you hit anyone, hit him hard. It's very dangerous to hit anyone lightly."

"I don't intend to hit anyone," I answered, feeling more foolish than ever.

"You didn't last week either, did you?"

"That was something else."

We stood there for about twenty minutes and then, under R——'s expert direction, we made several quiet circuits of the house. I hadn't played Indian since I was very young, and I felt astonishingly silly and reflected upon the idiotic things men do when they begin to shed civilization. It turned out, however, that R——'s precautions were based on reality. That night a series of separate attacks upon people in the area began. At my house, however, nothing happened. We slept quietly, and in the morning we were at N——'s house bright and early for breakfast.

When we left, N—— took his son with him, and suggested that we follow along in my car. We drove into Peekskill, along one of the main streets of the town, and saw the first of those

banners which have since become the sloganized expression of that Sunday. Strung across the avenue, it read: "WAKE UP AMERICA! PEEKSKILL DID!" That was the first, but the slogan was everywhere, hanging from houses, pasted on telegraph poles, and stuck on the windshields of numerous cars passing us—early though it was. (It was now shortly after eight o'clock in the morning.)

Reflectively, R——said, *"Deutschland, erwache!"* the German equivalent, which had been shouted so often in the streets of Frankfurt, Nuremberg, Hamburg and Berlin, which had been chanted by the brownshirts as they fulfilled their divine purpose of beating Jews and Communists and flinging the works of Mann, Heine and Wasserman into the flames, and which had become the battle cry and the rallying cry for the taking of power by the Nazis. I wondered then—and have wondered since—whether this transliteration was one of the curious accidents of history, the symptomatic fever of a similar disease, regardless of geographical roots, or whether the "storm troopers" of Peekskill consciously translated the Hitlerian slogan to their own purposes. The latter would not surprise me; since, as I pointed out before, the fascists of the first attack had taken Hitler as their hero and shouted his name at us again and again. It is a mistake to imagine that fascists are just good-natured brutes, motivated by their spontaneous hatreds, without any conscious understanding of their aims and purposes; but it is also fascinating, if bitter, to contemplate a world wherein Adolf Hitler becomes the paragon of what is American, as opposed to such "un-American" elements as Robeson and Fast.

A short while later we reached the place chosen for the second Peekskill concert, and a word of explanation about this is in order. At the meeting at Mt. Kisco a week before—or more properly at Katonah, since it was nearer to that village—the *Westchester Committee for Law and Order* had come into being. This group of local citizens had established themselves as an ad-hoc committee to fight for civil rights in Westchester County, and one of their first steps was to invite People's Artists to hold another concert as

soon as possible, with Paul Robeson as guest singer. As with the first concert, the Civil Rights Congress of Harlem was chosen as chief recipient of whatever funds might be collected. The trade unions in and around New York were called upon to protect the meeting, and I will tell later how they responded.

To decide to hold the meeting was one thing; to find a place to hold it was something else entirely. The owner of Lakeland Acres, the place of last Saturday's events, was friendy and well-disposed toward us; but he quite justly pointed to the havoc the fascists had made of his picnic grounds. He could not see himself going through that again, not to mention the threats and reprisals which would result from cooperation on his part. And dozens of other owners of picnic grounds and property said much the same.

Finally a place was offered to us, and it was gratefully accepted. This place was owned by a former refugee from German fascism, a man who knew on the basis of personal experience what *Peekskill* meant, and who was watching a hideous retake of scenes from his own early life. He knew the risks he took by offering his place to us; he also knew the consequences he faced—an attempt to burn down his house, as it turned out, bullets through the walls, etc.—but in spite of this, he determined that as a principled measure, as his own blow for the right of public assembly and freedom of speech, he would make his place available for the concert.

Strangely enough, this place, the Hollow Brook Country Club, was almost an exact physical replica of Lakeland Acres. It lay in exactly the same position off the same road, and its entrance was only half a mile further from Peekskill than the entrance to the former place. Even its topography was similar, except that the private road leading in was somewhat shorter and that the open space at the bottom of the hollow was larger and flatter, making an arena at least four times the size of the one at Lakeland. It had once been a country club, and its broad meadows were grown long with seed grass. It was being held simply as real-estate property, and this was the first public use to which it had been put in some time.

We had expected to be among the very first to reach there early that morning; but it turned out that a good many others had the same idea, and were taking no chances on being prevented from reaching the place. At that hour there was no sign of any sort of fascist demonstration on the state road, but already more than a hundred cars of concert-goers and trade unionists were parked inside the grounds. The sight of that gave me an idea of what sort of crowd would turn up.

Driving well into the grounds, I chose a safe, out of the way place to park my car. While a concert in Westchester County is less dangerous than a war, it pays to learn; my ancient hired Plymouth had done yoeman service and would continue to give satisfaction. Then we strolled around the place, watching preparations being made to secure the grounds.

If ever my admiration for the discipline, strength and courage of the working class was confirmed, it was that day at Peekskill. Only in the weather was there any similarity to the week before and the awful, outnumbered fight our little group had made; the sky was blue and clear; the morning was crisp and cool and utterly delightful; and the lovely hills that hemmed in the valley were green, peaceful and deceptive. On a little hill which commanded the whole place, and which was to one's left as one entered the grounds, a command post had been set up by Leon Straus of the *International Fur and Leather Workers Union*. His staff consisted of representatives of half a dozen other unions as well as a group of his own men.

There on the hilltop was abundant evidence of order, discipline and organization. A tent had been raised as a first-aid shelter. Stacked and sheltered, were piles of first-aid supplies and gallon-size canteens of water. Six volunteer runners were already at hand, sitting and waiting for orders which would take them to any part of the dozen or so acres which had to be protected, and the group of trade unionists who had taken on the job of seeing to it that this concert would not be a repetition of the last were crouched over a

scale map and plan for the defense of the grounds. It had to be a unique type of defense, a defense without weapons, a defense, if possible, without a blow being struck, a defense which would achieve its purpose through the highest type of discipline and restraint.

The story of the setting up and execution of that defense has never fully been told. It deserves to be told because that defense was wholly and uniquely an expression of the American working class; and for other reasons too, for this was the first time—to my knowledge—that our working class had engaged in precisely this kind of an effort, an effort so vast and so coordinated, in defense of a singer and a people's hero whom they loved and honored.

The best way to describe the defense is from my own vantage point there on the hillside where I sat for hours, watching it being set up, watching Leon Straus marshal it out, pull it together, set the pieces to matching. Also, I know of no better tribute to Straus than to tell what he accomplished there and of the leadership he gave afterwards. He has many qualities, great qualities.

After our arrival there was a steady stream of concert-goers, as well as trade union volunteers for the defense. The concert-goers came in individual cars or in hired buses, more of them in cars, I would guess, while the trade unionists—from Local 65, from fur and electrical, from furniture and the shoe workers' union, as well as from maritime and the needle trades—arrived for the most part by bus, each local sending its organized contingent. The concert-goers drove into the grounds, where their cars were parked in orderly rows, and they continued to arrive even after the concert had finally started. The trade unionists came earlier; for the most part they left their buses near the entrance and marched down the road toward the natural arena.

The arena lay just below and beyond the command post, sheltered to some degree from the road by the bluff of the hill. We were unable to provide chairs, and in any case we could only guess how many people would come, so it was decided that they would

sit on the grass and make themselves comfortable in whatever way they could.

The first contingents of trade unionists were already arriving when we got there, and during the next two hours several thousand of them marched in. As each group appeared, they were met by one of Straus's runners, who identified them and stayed with them until they were given an area of the perimeter of defense. I have no way of determining now just how long this perimeter of defense was, and the pictures we have available show only sections of it; but it enclosed the whole space of the concert, twenty-five thousand in the audience and more than a thousand automobiles, and always there was a space of more than a quarter of a mile between any part of the perimeter and the edge of the audience, and the guards stood shoulder to shoulder, literally touching each other. Official estimates put the number of trade unionists on the perimeter at two thousand, five hundred. Thus it becomes apparent what a vast organizational problem it was to lay out these men in a solid line over the distance I describe. The credit for this must go to Straus and the men who worked with him.

To watch it happen, all within two and a half hours, was a thrilling sight. The groups of trade unionists cut over the fields, through the woods, out of sight frequently, and then all of a sudden the line began to take shape. First a piece of it here, then another piece there, then sections to fill in, then the gaps grew smaller and smaller, and then suddenly there was this endless wall of human bodies solidly around the whole great area.

Below, in the center of the natural arena where a single, tall oak tree stood, a second line of guards was established within the audience, covering perhaps half an acre.

While this went on, both the audience and the fascists began to gather. The audience swelled beyond belief. We had anticipated five, perhaps ten thousand men and women to hear the concert—but we had ten thousand and fifteen thousand and twenty thousand, and still they came. From Harlem, busload after busload; from

Brooklyn and the Bronx and Manhattan, from Jersey City and Newark—more and more busloads. And private cars, hundreds and hundreds, each car loaded to capacity—something for which we paid an awful price, as you will see.

As our own crowd swelled, the fascist counter-demonstration, held on the state road, fell short of its goal. Not only had they themselves predicted that thirty thousand veterans would turn up to prevent the concert—a holy duty—but every radio station and newspaper in the state echoed their call for volunteers for violence. As it turned out, however, there were never more than a thousand men in their parade; and there is no doubt that for every war veteran in their demonstration, we had ten in ours. As far as these thousand were concerned, our guards could have taken ample care of them at any part of the perimeter, but this time the police entered the picture very early in the day, and this time there were a thousand state and county police, a thousand well-armed, coordinated police with a very definite purpose in mind.

And as our defense preparations were completed, as the audience grew and Straus's human wall formed itself—and held absolute position, resisting provocation under a hot sun for hours—the purpose of the police was put into action.

The role of the police on this day must be noted carefully—and noted again and again as the various incidents of the day are unfolded; for a cop's club is an agile weapon, and the man who swings it has the law and the courts and the judges on his side, and to prove anything against him is just about as hard as handling eels after you've coated the palms of your hands with vaseline.

When Straus and the people with him planned the defense, they knew they were acting wholly within the law. The defense was orderly and unarmed, and since we had rented the whole of the vast grounds, what we did on them was our affair and our right, just so long as we broke no law in doing it. But when the police saw the completeness and solidarity of the defense, they began immediately to attempt ways of breaking it down.

At eleven o'clock they marched about three hundred state troopers into the grounds and dispersed them over the area. At one o'clock, Superintendent Gaffney of the police came to Leon Straus and demanded that he pull in the whole perimeter a quarter of a mile. This would have placed the guards and audience in one solid block, giving the fascists an opportunity to swarm into the place and prevent the concert.

Straus refused. Gaffney ranted and threatened, but Straus pointed out to him that we had hired this ground and that we could put our guards wherever we pleased and that we damn well intended to do so. He also pointed out to Gaffney that at no point were our guards less than twenty yards from the state road, and he didn't see how any trouble could arise unless we were attacked. Thereupon, Gaffney gave his ultimatum: either we pulled our line of guards back, or he would pull out every one of his cops.

"We don't need them," Straus smiled. "There won't be any violence in this place."

A while later, three hundred troopers marched out of the grounds and took up places on the road. Until now, the fascist demonstration on the road had made a pretense of being an orderly parade—orderly in form, but typically filthy in content of the curses and abuse and vile oaths flung at the people who entered the grounds. (It is worth remarking how consistently these apostles of "Christianity" and "Americanism" indulge in language not only unprintable but also unthinkable to decent human beings.) But now the police gave the signal to drop the pretense.

A barrage of rock-throwing began. Backed by hundreds of laughing cops, the American Legion heroes lined the road and heaved rocks at our defense line. The range was long, but every now and then a rock would strike one of our guards. Several of them were badly injured there, but not once in all the long hours of that day did the line break or retreat. It was a magnificent demonstration of quiet courage and determination.

The cops, on the other hand, went into their own routine—the time-worn routine of the American policeman when he is given a chance to show what he is made of. The entrance to the concert grounds was now blocked, and several late carloads of Negroes arrived.

These late cars—note that the concert had already begun, which I will return to in a moment—were halted by the fascists, and several of the Negroes were dragged out into the road. When they resisted and fought for their right to go through, the police took a hand. (Even as Louis Budenz has become synonymous with honor in today's America, so might gallantry be defined as the opportunity for a dozen cops to attack a single Negro with their nightsticks.) They took a hand in their typical manner, beating, clubbing the Negroes—beating and clubbing without reason or provocation, but with unbelievably ferocious hatred. This went on up on the road, and these particular incidents were photographed as well as attested to by subsequent statements of the Negroes involved; so my own testimony is neither involved nor in doubt. The incidents were cruel, senseless, barbaric and unnecessary, and at the time we did not know about them. The topography of the place was such that these beatings were not visible even to the line of guards, much less to the audience below.

Meanwhile, close to twenty-five thousand people were gathering in the hollow below to hear the concert. They had seated themselves, on the ground for the most part, in a half circle around the inner ring of guards; and I might mention that these guards were a precaution against the possibility of the infiltration of a small fascist gang with intent to assassinate Paul Robeson. Though this sounds somewhat dramatic in the telling, subsequent events proved that Leon Straus dealt with cold reality, and dealt with it very well indeed.

I think it was about noontime that Robeson arrived. The singers and musicians from People's Artists had arrived a little earlier, and since I had to make up the program, we sat down below, next to

the sound truck, and talked it over. Under advice of the security people, Robeson remained in his car.

There were Pete Seeger, Sylvia Kahn, and a number of others, one of them a young concert pianist of talent and importance. They were thrilled by the occasion, the crowd, the sea of human beings. When had there been a chance to sing to a mass of people as great as this?

"And it's all yours," I told them. "Whatever has to be said here today aside from my own remarks, you'll have to say with your music and songs.

"That's the moment we always dreamed of," Pete Seeger grinned. "To do it with songs and with nothing else."

"Well, that's the way you'll have to do it. Suppose we start some group singing in about a half hour. Then you'll lead off. Then the piano pieces; then Paul; then we'll take a collection; then you people again, and then Paul to close the program."

"It sounds good."

"Then write down the titles of your numbers, so I can announce them."

I walked to Paul's car and said hello to him. It was the first chance to speak to him since the Saturday before, and I was full of the contrast between the two occasions and understandably proud of that wall of trade unionists which surrounded the whole area.

"A little different," I remember saying.

He nodded, but he was sober and troubled. He felt what was in the making, but I was full of our own strength and our own discipline and full of contempt for the creatures on the road. Nothing was going to happen; this was our day!

I walked over to the sound truck and was standing there talking to the engineer, when the man responsible for security at the center came over and motioned me aside.

"Howard," he said, "I want you to set the sound truck under that big oak, right under it."

(You will recall that there was one great oak in the center of the arena area.)

"How can we? If we put the sound truck under the tree, our people will be singing through the branches. That doesn't make sense."

"It makes sense."

"Why?"

"Because we've had our scouts out in the woods and up there on the hills since early this morning, and we just learned that they flushed up two local patriots who had made a little nest for themselves up there overlooking the valley. And they had high-powered rifles with telescopic sights. In other words, they want to kill Paul, and they will stop at very little to do it. So put the sound truck under the tree."

You do not equate fascism with sanity; I had learned that. You do not equate it with reason, with intelligence, with civilization or decency or morality. The impossible becomes possible, the incredible credible; what is evil is matter of fact and part and parcel of the whole.

I had the sound truck placed under the tree. Then I took the program notes, went up to the microphone, and announced that we would begin our concert. Believe me, I did not feel good or comfortable or brave; the branches made a poor shelter indeed, and I had no assurance that those high-powered rifles with the telescopic sights might not be indecisive as to their target. When I got down and when Pete Seeger had begun to sing, I went to our security head and told him.

"I don't think Paul ought to sing," I said. "The hell with it! It's not that important, and if you want to be naked, just stand up there."

"He's going to sing. He's decided that. He'll be all right. We've taken certain measures."

They took measures, which meant that fifteen workers did a very brave and a very selfless thing. When Paul Robeson stood

up to sing, those fifteen workers stood behind and alongside of him, forming a human wall between him and the hillside, and in this they were neither uncertain nor troubled. It was something they did quite casually and matter of factly, but it was also something I will never forget. They were white workers and Negro workers, and this giant of a man was one of the very, very few intellectuals in the whole land who had not fled from their side, who had not betrayed them, who had not crawled for cover, but stood like a rock unperturbed and unshaken. This was a better answer than words.

So our concert went smoothly enough, and with all the difficulties there was good music there that day. The great voice of Paul Robeson echoed back from the hills; the music of Handel and Bach was played there; and Pete Seeger and his friends sang those fine old songs of a time when treason and hatred and tyranny were not the most admired virtues of Americans. And the police did what they could. When they saw that they were not able to prevent the concert, they brought in a helicopter and it hovered over our sound truck constantly, swooping down to buzz us again and again, trying to drown out the sound of our music with the noise of its motor. To some extent they succeeded, but we were fortunate that the motor of a helicopter is less noisy than that of a regular airplane. It did not spoil the concert.

In any case, the important factor was that the concert had been held and that the right of assembly had been upheld; and through it all *no person on our side* had committed any act of provocation, nor had any person on our side broken the disciplined order of our defenses.

That was accomplished, but at the same time it was a new America, a different America, in which thousands of workers and their allies had to conduct a mass struggle of such size and consequence for a Negro singer to give his music to people who wanted to hear it. A change had come about, not in the eight days of *Peekskill*—more gradually than that, certainly for a long time before

that in process—but brought to a head and climaxed by the eight days; and in this changed America, we had won a victory in the name of the American people, most certainly in the name of the American people and in the very best traditions of the American people.

Yet the day was not by any means over, not by any means; and it was only late afternoon now, and the night of terror and horror, so much greater terror and so much worse horror than a week before, still lay ahead. The concert was done, and once again I found R—— and the two of us walked aimlessly among the crowd. Now was the time for getting out, but though cars had driven into the entranceway and filled the inside road, nothing moved. We who were in the hollow below did not know what held things up. We took it for granted that it required time and patience to clear such a place of so many hundreds of cars through one narrow road. We didn't know that the fascists had blocked the road, that our security people were arguing with the police to clear it or let us clear it ourselves. We also didn't know that the police were set for their spell of riot, their own incredible plan of what should happen. We didn't know any of that yet. The evening was still early in the Hudson River Valley, with shadows becoming longer and the sun dropping lower, but with the enormous crowd in a holiday spirit, a picnic spirit, nobody too impatient, everybody pleased that this simple act of assembly had been carried through.

It was a family crowd, as it was bound to be on a summer afternoon. There were many women, more women than men, I suppose, for so many of the men were in the defense line of the perimeter; there were a great many children, a great many very small children, and at least a few hundred infants. You might wonder that so many people would bring children and little infants after what had happened the week before, but I must explain that by and large people were not ready to accept what had happened the week before, even intelligent progressive people who had known about fascism for so long. For one thing, until you read it in this

account, there was no complete narrative of the first Saturday of *Peekskill*. I had not told the story fully, nor had anyone else; so that while it was known that there had been trouble, no one really saw the complexion of that trouble. People said to themselves,

"The first time, the trouble was an accident. The police didn't arrive until very late and things got out of hand. But this time the whole world has its eyes on Peekskill, and there can't possibly be any trouble. The governor would not allow it. The state troopers would not allow it. The county police would not allow it. District Attorney Fanelli is in enough hot water already, and certainly he would not allow it. So it will just be a sunny, peaceful concert, and we'll bring the kids and have a good time."

Yes, as inconceivable as it sounds, that is what people said to themselves and to each other, and that is why they brought little children and nursing infants with them; for the reality of what did happen was even more inconceivable.

Now, while we were waiting for the cars to begin to move, two of our security guards appeared, escorting a young hoodlum who had crept through their lines. He sat on the grass, looking around him, a lad of eighteen or so with his face full of hate and his eyes full of terror. But no one had hurt him or made any move to hurt him, and while R——and I watched, two women tried to explain to him some meaning in connection with his role. He couldn't listen; there was too much hatred all through him, and when the guards told him to go, he bolted like a deer.

Cars were moving now and the afternoon was wearing on. R——, who has spent the best years of his life being a soldier in two wars and an industrial organizer, has a better nose for danger than I have, and now he was shaking his head.

"I don't like it, I don't like it," he kept saying.

We got in the car. Two men begged us for a lift, and we put them in back. I started the motor and pulled into the outgoing line. Then the line stood still, and I cut my motor. It seemed like a long wait was on the agenda.

Two of the security guards passed down the line of cars, telling each driver, "Close all windows as you approach the exit. They seem to be throwing things."

The situation was new to us, and Fords and Plymouths and Pontiacs were not built as military weapons. If people were throwing things, it seemed eminently correct that the windows should be closed protectively, and motorists as a whole have a rather child-like faith in the much-touted and widely advertised shatter-proof glass. No one questioned the advice, but even if they had, the damage would have simply taken other forms.

The line would move a few feet, then stop; a wait of about five minutes and then a few feet more. Driving an old car and depending on it, I was afraid of overheating, so I cut my motor constantly. But then suddenly we were in motion and the entrance was in sight and we rolled up and through it and out. A small cluster of hell was at work at the entrance; cops, in a craze of hate, were beating cars, not people, with their long clubs, smashing fenders, lashing out against windshields, doing a dance of frenzy as the autos rolled out of the place. Even through our closed windows we could hear the flood of insanely vile language from the police, the unprintable oaths, the race words, the slime and filth of America's underworld of race hatred compressed into these "guardians" of the law, and released now. There were about thirty of them grouped there at the entrance, and they flogged the cars as if the automobiles were living objects of their resentment.

(That was the experience, incidently, of the car which carried Paul Robeson. The police beat in the windshield and smashed at the car itself in their desire to get at the occupants.)

But that was only the beginning. When a car left the concert grounds, it had a choice of three roads. Directly ahead, through the state road, was a narrow byroad which led to the parkway. The state road itself ran north and south, so it might be thought of as approaching a T from the top of the crossbar; that is, the state road made the crossbar and the small road the upright of the T. The

crazy dance of police fury imposed a quick decision on each car, and my own was to turn right since I did not know the other two roads and had a very strong desire to drive on familiar territory.

This is what happened and what I saw. I state it carefully, as something I witnessed, with R—— beside me to support this statement. I might add, however, that the experience on each of the other two roads was a good deal worse, particularly on the narrow road which led to the parkway. Of what happened on that road, ample photographs give evidence.

It happened more quickly than it takes to tell it, but it must be told slowly. About thirty yards after I turned right on the state road, it began. On the left side of the road there were two policemen. The two policemen were about twenty feet apart, and between them were six or seven legionnaires with a great pile of heavy rocks. As my car came within range, they began to throw. The cops did not throw. They watched, smiling approval, and it became evident that these two policemen had been detached as guards for the group of rock-throwers—just in case a car should stop and turn on the rock-throwers.

(I dwell on this because this same thing was true of every organized group of rock-throwers. Each group had one or two cops detailed—I say detailed because I can't believe that the cops just wandered along the road—as protection. It is true that there were many individual rock-throwers along the road without police protection, but where they were in groups, cops were with them.)

One reacts slowly, and I only comprehended what was happening when the first rocks crashed against the car. The first hit the door frame, between the front and rear windows; the second hit the frame of the windshield; two more heavy rocks crashed into the body of the car. The cops held their bellies and howled with mirth.

Fortunately, I had a block or two of empty road in front of me, and I was able to step on the gas and shoot ahead. Forty or fifty yards, and there was the second group, and this time, full of rage, I turned my car into them and roared over the shoulder at forty

miles an hour. The group scattered and the cops tumbled away for shelter. The third group, however, caught us like sitting ducks, and once again the flood of boulders crashed against the car. Once again amazing luck was with us; the rocks smashed against the body and frame of the car, missing the windows. (Ours was one of the very few cars which escaped without broken glass and bleeding passengers.) With the next group, on the left this time, I used the same tactics as before, driving across the road, up on the shoulder and right into them, and as before they scattered. And so it went, from group to group, through that nightmare gauntlet.

Then, suddenly, we had to slow down. The car ahead of us had fared worse than we; every window was smashed, even the rear window. I remember saying to R——,

"The road is wet. They must have gotten the gas tank or the radiator."

There was a dark wetness that flowed out of the car ahead of us; and then we realized that it was blood, but an enormous flow of blood that ran from the car that way and onto the road.

The rocks began again, and I jockeyed on. We had gone over a mile now. The car ahead pulled over to the side and the driver sat with his head hanging over the wheel. His head was bloody all over.

After a mile and a half there were no more large, organized groups of rock-throwers, but individuals instead. An occasional crashing blow reminded us of the individuals. (But further on, three, four, five and ten miles from Peekskill, organized groups were stationed on every overpass, to pelt the cars below with rocks. In this way, many cars which had never been near the concert that day were badly smashed and their occupants hurt.)

Two miles or so from the concert grounds, a car had pulled into a gas station. This car, like so many others, left a trail of blood behind it. Five adults and one child emerged, and they were all covered with blood from head to foot. The child was weeping softly and they stood like people dazed, and a few feet away a

group of young hoodlums hurled rocks at the passing cars. I pulled over to the gas station to stop and see if we could help the wounded people, but a cop stationed there ran at us, screaming oaths and beating the car with his club. When he started to draw his revolver, we drove on. Another car stopped and R——, turning around, saw the policeman beat the windshield of the car in with his club while he drew his revolver with his other hand. It was behavior which bordered on the paranoid, and though I have many times in the past seen police go into their frenzied dance of hatred against workers or progressives, I never saw anything to equal this display. And I must make the point that these were not single instances, for a while later when we stopped at a crossroad, we saw another policeman smashing in the windshield of a car which had halted for directions.

In Peekskill, in Buchanan and in Croton-on-Hudson, we continued to run the gauntlet of rocks, and the road we traveled was running with blood and littered with broken glass. Never in all my life have I seen so much blood; never have I seen so many people so cruelly cut and bleeding so badly. At another service station we saw three cars parked in a great spreading pool of blood and the people trying to staunch the flow of it.

R——and I dropped the two passengers we carried at Harmon, where they were going to take a train north to their summer cottage. We discussed going back to the concert grounds, but it was evening now and we decided that it would be to no purpose to try to return. By now, certainly, all the cars were out; and as for the horror of proceeding along the roads, we still had to face that ourselves, and we could not change it. We drove to my house; it was still and peaceful in the twilight. I called the N——'s but no one answered the phone, and I wondered where they and their three children were.

"New York?" I asked R——. He nodded, and we got in the car and drove down the hill, and ran into another barrage of rocks at Harmon. (My windows were down now. I preferred to take my

chances with rocks rather than flying glass.) We turned onto the parkway, and a car in front of us was met by a volley of heavy rocks from the first overpass we came to. I drove wide and around to escape, but the car behind us was shattered glass and bleeding passengers. And all the rest of the way back into New York City we saw those cars around us on the road—the bent fenders where the police had smashed them in, the shattered windows, the bleeding passengers. It was as though the survivors of a bombing raid or a battle were driving into the city. . . .

In the city, I dropped R—— and came back to my own house. It was night time now, and the children were being made ready for bed. Mrs. M—— had been keeping supper hot for me. It was a quiet, orderly world, the world of so many Americans, the world of sanity and peace and civilization. It was the world which had looked out on the monstrosities of German and Italian and Spanish and Japanese and Greek and Hungarian and Rumanian fascism and had said, with such childlike and insular certainty, "It can't happen here."

I ate what my stomach would hold, and then turned on the radio and listened to the piecemeal descriptions of the assault on human life and human dignity. The hospitals were filling up; all over Westchester the hospitals were filling up with the blinded, the bleeding and the wounded, the cut, lacerated faces, the fractured skulls, the infants with glass in their eyes, the men and women trampled and beaten, the Negroes beaten and mutilated, all the terribly hurt who had come to listen to music. . . .

I paced back and forth, nervous, worried; it was not over—asking myself the question: "Would it ever be over?"

Then the phone rang. It was a friend in the city, and he told me something of what had happened at the end of things. About a thousand of the trade unionists had remained to the very end—to prevent a mob attack on the grounds. They didn't know at that time, I believe, what was transpiring along the roads. Their buses had driven off, but they remained to hold the place, and finally in

a group they began to march out. The police drove them back into the grounds. With swinging clubs, the police—hundreds of police—charged into them, beat many of them into insensibility, pulled guns on them, arrested twenty-five of them—who were marched away with hands over their heads, like prisoners of war—then searched the rest for weapons. No weapons were found. The police surrounded the trade unionists with guns drawn and held on them. Finally, in the darkness, they were told,

"All right—get out of here!"

Now my friend told me that word had just come from a group of them stranded near Golden's Bridge. Would I drive back and look for them?

So I went back—and as I drove through Peekskill, a bullet whistled past my car, just to complete the enormous insanity. Just to make the whole of it as impossible and as monstrous as it actually was.

I followed instructions, but when I reached the place, all had gone, and the little store where they had been was dark and closed. I drove home then. I had two brandies and went to bed.

The eight days of *Peekskill* were finished.

Part Seven

A Point of View

AT THE TIME OF THIS writing it is fifteen months since the *Peekskill Affair;* and the onrush of events, moving with bewildering rapidity, has made of those two nights of horror isolated incidents of the past. Since then the McCarran Act has legalized the police state in America, and the creeping rot of fascism is infesting the country. Since then, the Korean war—and the immense war propaganda which accompanies it—has put severe penalties upon any form of protest or dissent, and thousands of "liberals" and "progressives" have run for cover. At the time of *Peekskill,* there was almost no political prisoner in American jails; today there are a great many. At the time of *Peekskill,* the leaders of the Communist Party of the United States were on trial; since then they have been found guilty and the Communist Party has been placed under indictment by the McCarran Act. At the time of *Peekskill,* mass deportation of aliens had not yet begun nor was the concentration camp at Ellis Island in operation as it is today. At the time of *Peekskill,* this was not wholly a land of loyalty oaths, witch hunts, and terror for all who might hate war and love peace and democracy. And at the time of *Peekskill,* the plan to divide and betray the American labor movement had not yet been brought to fruition.

Such is the speed of history today that, when this is published, so many new and perhaps more shocking developments may have taken place that the events herein detailed may seem even more remote. But even if that is the case, they will not thereby be less important. *Peekskill* was a decisive step in the preparation for American fascism and it was a proving ground for a great deal that came afterwards.

Unfortunately, much about both Peekskill incidents remains unknown and will, perhaps, not be revealed for years to come. The degree to which high state and county officials were implicated has not been determined yet, but the above narration and appendix which follows contain ample proof that they were implicated. What private discussions, plots and agreements led up to *Peekskill,* I do not know—but again there seems no doubt that there were such discussions, plots and agreements. I would like to know, for example, how the three Department of Justice agents happened to be upon the scene; I would like to know what happened to the three lost deputy sheriffs; I would like to know what withheld the state police, who apparently were on the scene long before they intervened, from coming down into the hollow at Lakeland Acres and halting the attack; I would like to know who gave them their orders to enter when the possibility of frameup finally arose; I would like to know who the two marksmen with the high-powered rifles and the telescopic sights were, and whether they were operating on their own or in agreement with others.

It is also wholly proper to ask a number of questions concerning the role of the police in general. Why were the ringleaders of the first attack not arrested, when their names were known to hundreds in the area? Why were no police—except the three sheriffs—on hand when the Saturday night trouble began? Why were the police so insistent that the guards at the second concert be moved into the actual area of the concert itself? Why and through whose instructions did the police take on the task of protecting the rock-throwing units? Why did the police attack and arrest so many of

the guards after the concert was over and the audience had gone?

In asking these questions I do not refer to police brutality in general, to the clubbing and beating of Negroes, and to the frenetic attacks upon automobiles and the people in them which the police carried out, a number of which I witnessed personally. These are so universally the mode of police behavior in relation to any sort of left wing or working class demonstration that they can be considered the natural—or unnatural—and ordinary role of police in America.

Many more questions of this sort can be asked, but I think those questions are explicit in the account I have given here as well as in the appendix which follows. The important thing is, I think, to see the manifestation of *Peekskill* in relation to national and world events which followed and which still go on. Anyone who participated in any way in either of the two incidents cannot help but be struck by the extraordinary difference in the behavior of the two factions—the fascists on the one hand (and *fascist* is the only correct, scientific term for them, whether they called themselves legionnaires, veterans, patriots or what you will), and the people rallied around Paul Robeson on the other.

It must be noted that no aggressive act of violence came from the progressives; it must be noted that *all* trouble was provoked by the fascist elements; and it must be noted that *all* recourse to force was on the part of the fascists. The behavior of each side was dictated—as any intelligent person must concede—not by directives but by the forces represented and the ideology of the group itself; and here I refer to behavior in terms of violence rather than overall intent and plan.

This becomes all the more interesting in the light of the fact that during the time of both concerts, the eleven leaders of the Communist Party were on trial for the promulgation of ideas in terms of "force and violence." (And even today, as I write, I have before me an editorial in the New York *Journal American* which calls upon the American people to recognize that communism is "force and violence" disguised as an idea—if such a notion is conceivable.)

I know well enough how exceedingly late it is for the voices of logic and reason to be raised. Yet I think that they must be raised, even if those who raise them go down to defeat. A small light of civilization was kept burning over Germany from 1933 to 1945 by such voices, and regardless of what happens in the moment, history will eventually record the truth.

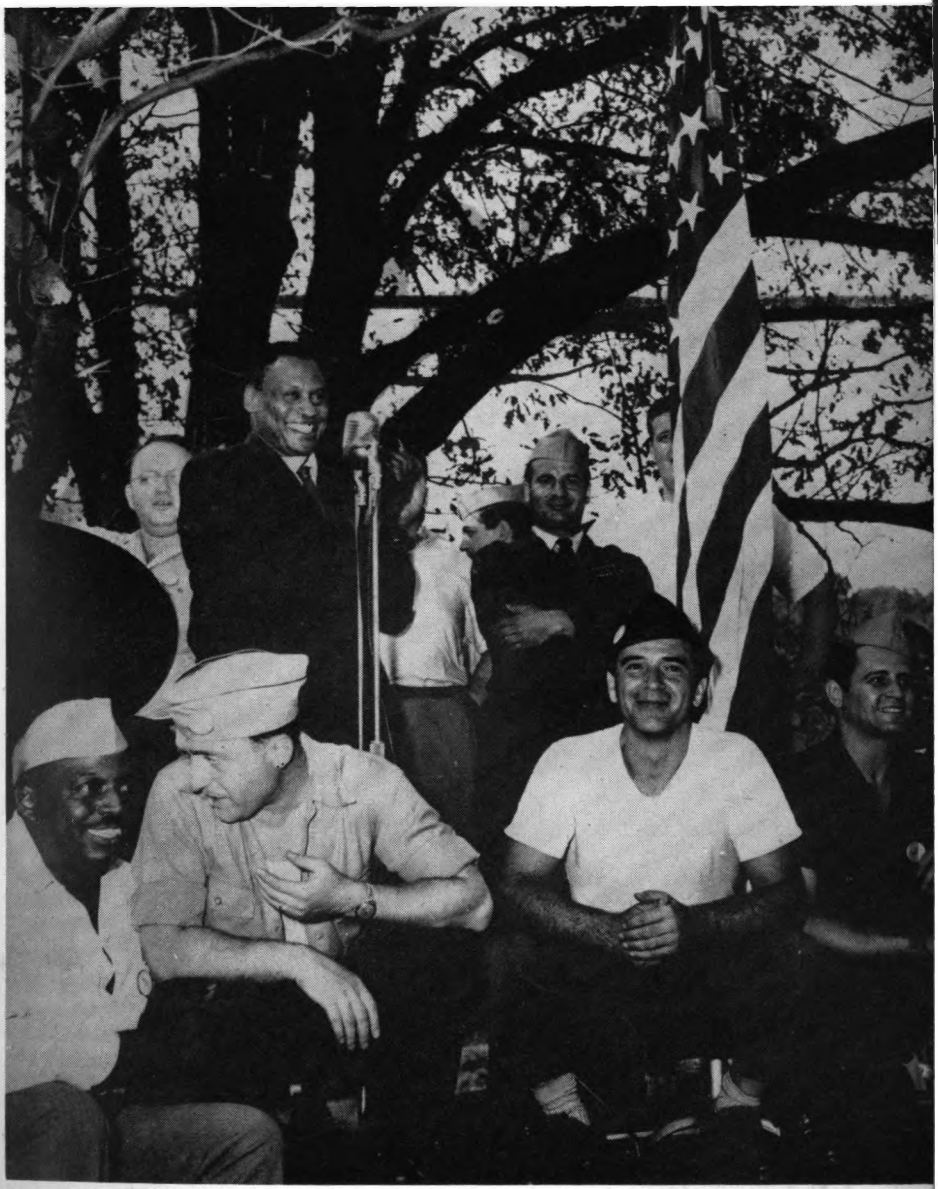
The *Peekskill* affair was an important step in the preparation for the fascization of America and for the creation of receptive soil for the promulgation of World War III. It was a candid display of force and violence by those constant and conscienceless advocates of force and violence, the masters and the tools within the scheme of American reaction. It was undoubtedly planned toward a two-fold result, the "entrapment" of numbers of progressives within a pattern of force and violence, for which they could be made to bear the burden of blame; and secondly, to arouse *lumpen* elements throughout America toward a fascist pattern of force and violence. Its profound usefulness to American reaction lay precisely in this content which it potentially contained; and therefore it is impossible for any thoughtful person not to relate it to the Communist trials in New York City.

The first purpose was foiled by the discipline and dignity of the progressive masses involved; the second purpose was foiled by the reaction of the American public in general, a reaction which is noted in the appendix. The American people not only were not ready for this particular combination of blood and filth which Adolf Hitler had so popularized, but serious doubts began to be entertained by the ruling class of the United States as to whether they could be made ready for this particular pattern quickly enough. Therefore, we saw an immediate turn to legalized, "police" fascism, as exemplified by the McCarran Act and the wholesale jailings of political prisoners. Since the "day of violence" had fallen short of its goal, the "day in court" was put forward once again.

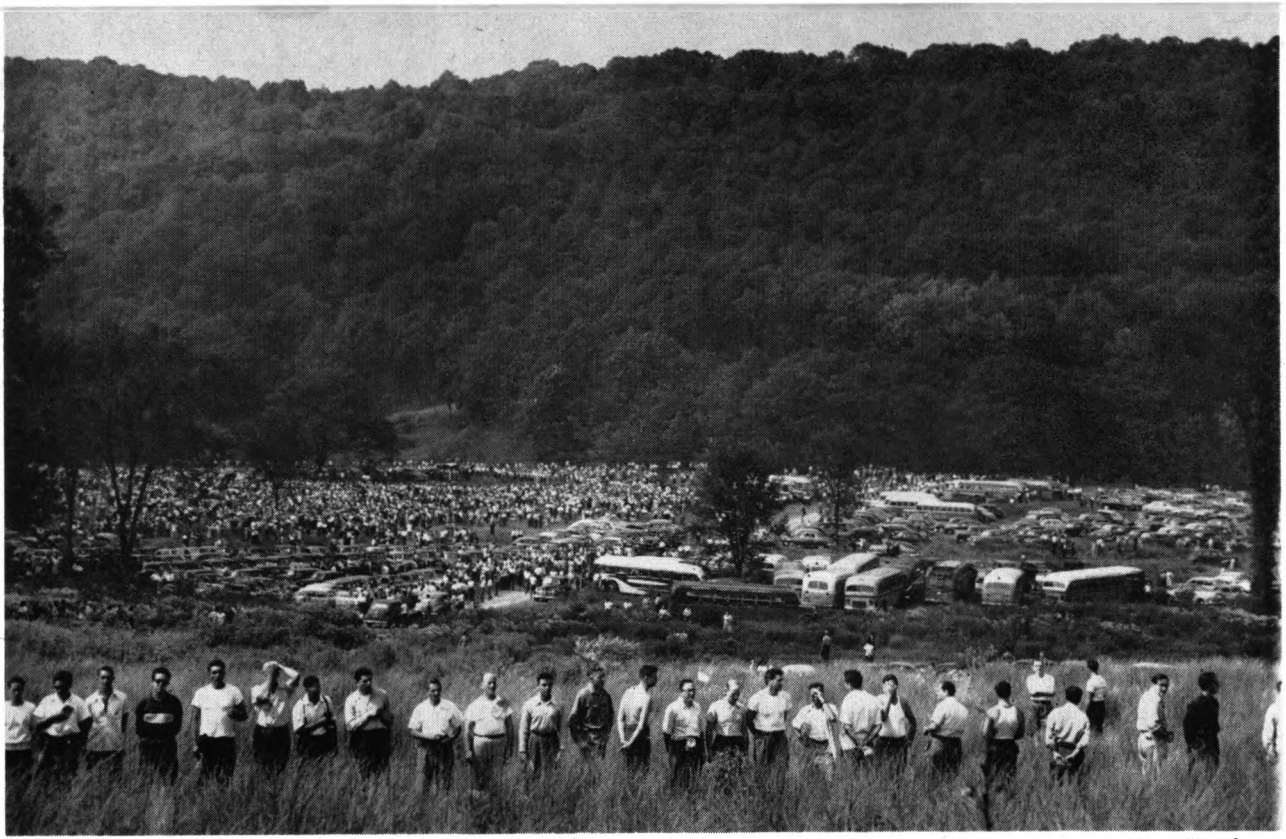
Peekskill was one among many incidents of "force and violence" against the *left* and not by the *left*. A similar study of any one of a

hundred other incidents of a provocative nature would yield much the same results. For example, Henry David's *History of the Haymarket Affair* illustrates this point well, as did my own study of the affair at Republic Steel. In each case, a careful inquiry established the fact that force and violence were introduced not by the *left* but by the *right.* To support this, it must be noted that not a single incident of like nature in the past can be laid, in terms of force and violence, in the camp of the *left.* The most exhaustive research, intelligence and study on the part of the Department of Justice, backed by their mighty financial resources, has failed to produce *one single instance* of force and violence on the part of the *left.* It becomes particularly meaningful, therefore, that during a trial of eleven Communist leaders on charges of "advocating the teaching" of certain philosophical concepts which, in the language of the indictment, led to "force and violence," the *Peekskill* affairs should occur. What a boon it would have been to the prosecution if they could have introduced *Peekskill* at the trial as evidence in their case! And what exemplary witnesses the three calm, neutral FBI agents could have been!

I think that I, personally, suffer from fewer illusions today than I did at the time of *Peekskill.* My books on American history, done with love of my country and pride in my country, are today interdicted as "false" and "vicious" and "treasonable." My refusal to play the role of a Louis Budenz was rewarded with a sentence in a federal prison. And my current unwillingness to repudiate all that is good and generous and honest in my past and in the past of my country has been met by a campaign of villification in the press and a denial of any passport rights by my government. However, I still cling to the belief that if the facts are presented to the American people, they will act upon these facts. Facts are stubborn and frightening things, and people who cling to facts are considered dangerous these days. It is very difficult for me to consider myself a dangerous person, but if devotion to facts requires that, then I accept the description.

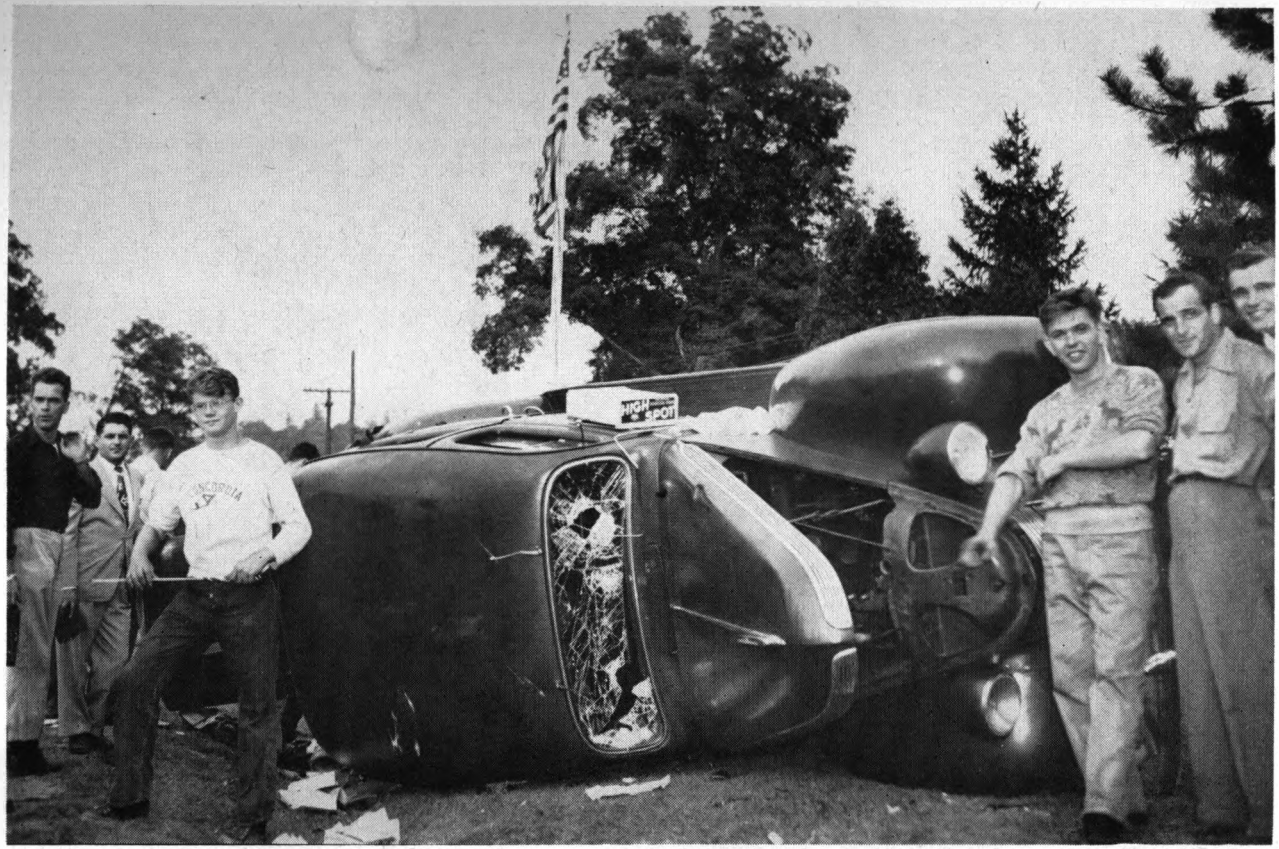


The platform for the concert was sheltered under a tree. The men standing behind Paul Robeson took their places with the full knowledge that they were providing a barrier of human flesh between him and the snipers. The eagerness with which they accepted this post is an unusual tribute to the love progressive America bears for Paul Robeson.



WORLD WIDE PHOTOS

A section of the defense line and a portion of the audience gathered for the second Peekskill concert. Remember that this defense line stretched all around the concert grounds and held its position in the hot sun for many hours. It was on the ridge in the background that the two snipers were concealed.



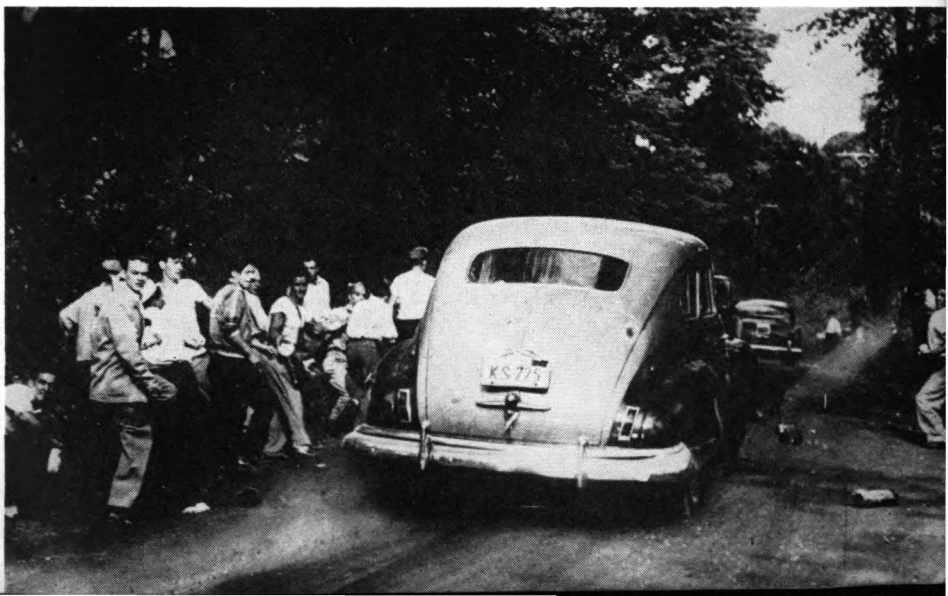
WORLD WIDE PHOTOS

A smashed car of some concert-goers and the hoodlums who did the smashing. These are obviously too young to have been veterans and were probably recruited for the occasion by neighborhood fascist organizations.

Eugene Bullard, one of the great war heroes of the Negro people, is struck to the ground by the clubs of state troopers and deputy sheriffs. The attack was without any provocation, as both bystanders and Mr. Bullard testified.

It was on such buses as this that the worst injuries occurred. In the crowded bus there was no room to hide. The story of Sidney Marcus in the Appendix tells what it was like to be inside these buses as they ran the gauntlet.

A car of concert-goers runs the gauntlet to the Parkway. This was one of the worst death traps of the various exits. The cars moved slowly and there was no escape from the rocks. Further down the road, at the right, you can see a policeman standing calmly and observing the work of the fascist hoodlums.



WORLD WIDE PHOTOS

This group of young hoodlums, gathered around one of Governor Thomas E. Dewey's state troopers, gives clear pictorial evidence of the dignity and the courage with which the super-patriots defend America.

To appreciate this scene you must understand that the people in the cars were blinded by flying glass. Notice the girl hanging over the back seat.

WORLD WIDE PHOT

Three of the most important participants in *Peekskill:* Paul Robeson, to the left, Leon Straus of the International Fur and Leather Workers Union, standing center, and Howard Fast, on the right. The injured man who is seated is Wilson McDowell who was hurt in one of the buses. Paul Robeson holds one of the rocks which crashed into the bus, over a smashed auto window.

William L. Patterson, one of the great leaders of the Negro people and the national head of the Civil Rights Congress. It was under Mr. Patterson's leadership that the Golden Gate meeting referred to in the book was organized. During the concerts and since then William L. Patterson has been in the vanguard of the struggle to halt this kind of growing fascism.

Appendix I

Summary Conclusions of the American Civil Liberties Union Investigation of the Two Peekskill Affairs

1. There is no evidence whatever of Communist provocation as defined on page 32* on either occasion.

2. While the demonstrations were organized to protest against and express hatred of Communism, the unprovoked rioting which resulted was fostered largely by anti-Semitism, growing out of local resentment against the increasing influx of Jewish summer residents from New York. It was heightened by the area's tradition of political violence evidenced in the attacks on the KKK which is now an important part of the local legend.

3. The local press bears the main responsibility for inflaming, possibly through sheer irresponsibility, Peekskill residents to a mood of violence.

4. Robeson's concerts were not an intrusion into Peekskill but were private gatherings held five miles outside of Peekskill which were disrupted deliberately by invading gangs from nearby localities.

5. Terrorism was general against all who advocated freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and preservation of constitutional rights.

6. The evidence proves beyond question that the veterans intended to prevent the concerts from being held.

7. Effective police protection at the first concert was deliberately withheld.

8. Preparations to police the second concert appeared adequate;

* ACLU pamphlet on Peekskill.

therefore, there was reason to believe that the concert-goers would be protected.

9. These preparations were largely a sham insofar as the Westchester County police were concerned and left the concert-goers undefended.

10. The wounding of William Secor, rioting veteran, occurred while he was assisting in the commission of a crime.

11. The location of the veterans' parades was deliberately provocative. The county authorities did not insist that the parades be held elsewhere.

12. The evidence indicates that at least some of the state troopers honestly tried to preserve law and order while county police fraternized with the rioters.

13. There is strong indication that the initial violence was planned and was carried out according to plan.

14. Terrorism spread over the whole area and included threats against private individuals, against their safety, lives, property and business.

15. National condemnation has been the chief factor causing residents of the Peekskill area to question this action. The local clergy have joined in this denunciation.

16. Sentiment in the area is now sharply divided and there is evidence that the legal authorities are moving toward restriction of freedom of speech and assembly, presumably in violation of the Constitution.

Appendix II

On the Role of the Police

1. Westchester Committee for a Fair Inquiry Into the Peekskill Violence

On Wednesday night, August 24, eleven residents of the Peekskill area, realizing that an atmosphere of violence was developing, sent the following telegram to N. Y. State Attorney General Nathaniel Goldstein, to Westchester County Executive Herbert Gerlach, and to County District Attorney George Fanelli:

"Inflammatory statements directed against the concert have appeared in the Peekskill (N. Y.) *Evening Star* of Tuesday, August 23.

"The editorial of that issue states: 'The time for tolerant silence is running out.' A letter to the editor appearing in the same issue, signed by Vincent Boyle, states: 'I am not intimating violence, but. . . .'

"In our view these statements lead to the inspiring of illegal action and violence against a peacefully conducted concert.

"We urge you to conduct an immediate investigation of these statements as well as the intentions of their authors.

"We also respectfully urge you to take all necessary measures to guarantee that the concert, the artists, the sponsors and guests are fully protected in the peaceful enjoyment of their civil liberties."

This telegram was received by the officials it was addressed to and was acknowledged. County Executive Herbert Gerlach replied by wire that he had referred his telegram to the District Attorney's office "and have every confidence that the matter will receive all necessary and proper attention from our law-enforcement dept."

The District Attorney's office stated that the matter would be referred to local authorities.

The Hawthorne barracks of the State Police (according to the *Peekskill Star,* Aug. 26) "said that no unusual circumstances were expected but that troopers would be on hand if needed."

2. Westchester Committee for a Fair Inquiry Into the Peekskill Violence (Concerning the First Concert)

On at least three separate occasions, from 7:30 until the police arrived at 10 p.m., men from the group defending the road and bandstand made their way out of the ambush to telephone the local police, the state police, the State Attorney General's office and Governor Dewey—all without result.

The three sheriffs and three FBI men, who had been on the scene from the beginning, made no arrests and held no one for questioning, though fourteen cars were overturned and at least thirteen people were hurt seriously enough to require medical attention.

3. Testomony of Leon Straus

"We asked Gaffney and Fanelli to provide an escort for Paul Robeson into the grounds. They refused to provide it.

"At about 11:00 o'clock several hundred policemen marched into the grove and were stationed throughout the area, some of them within the inner line of the concert guards.

"Then, at about 1:00 o'clock Gaffney came to see me in the grove, and demanded that I withdraw all our guards from the entire perimeter and move them inward a quarter of a mile or so. This I refused to do —because it would have left that whole area undefended.

"Gaffney threatened me that he would withdraw all his police and leave us without any police protection if I didn't comply with his demand. He then partially carried out his threat by removing all the several hundred policemen from the grove—they marched out in a body—which made it clear to us that there was collusion between the police and the mob.

"When the concert ended, the mob was blocking the exit completely.

"We then spoke to the police, demanding that the exit be opened. The police asked for time to clear the exit. It took about three-quarters of an hour for these 900 policemen to move the mob of about 1000 and create a little opening through which a car could pass. We are convinced that during this time the mob was given instructions to spread out along the road for several miles, specifically in places where the state troopers were supposed to guard the road.

"Finally, when all the cars had left, and more than half of our guards had left, about a thousand of the guards remained. These were organized into a body, and started marching out of the grounds, with the intention of finding transport by bus or train.

"The police then charged into the grove with their clubs out, and many with their guns out, encircled our guards, and beat up with their clubs several of them. They arrested about twenty-five of us at the head of the column, and marched us into the police compound with our hands over our heads, as prisoners.

"We were then searched for weapons of any sort, which we did not

have, and were held under arrest for several hours, while the remaining men in the grove—about a thousand—were similarly searched there.

"By 1:30 a.m. everyone had left the area."

4. American Civil Liberties Union on the First Concert

Observers of the first riot, including all newspapermen present, agree that no more than six police officers were on the scene until after 10 p.m. Because of this, the organizers of the concert have accused the state and county authorities of wilful failure to provide police protection for an assembly known to be threatened with mob violence. It is of paramount importance to decide whether that accusation be true.

The *New York News* of August 29 reported:

"The state troopers denied charges that they had not arrived in time to head off the three hour riot in which cars were overturned, women frightened into the woods, and veterans and Robeson fans alike beaten with clubs, stones and fence-posts. . . .

"In the first place, Sergeant Johnson (the first sergeant of Troop K at Hawthorne) pointed out the vets had a legal right to parade and had obtained a permit. Besides, he said, no one had officially requested that troopers be on hand before the trouble started.

" 'There was no need to be there in advance,' he asserted. 'We don't play into the hands of the Commies. We went in when we found that a crime had been committed.' "

The investigators are satisfied that Sergeant Johnson is telling the truth when he says that no one had officially requested that troopers be on hand. They are equally satisfied that this is intended to convey the impression that no request had been made for police protection.

Plea for Police Protection

The facts are:

At least three separate requests for police protection were made by the sponsors of the Robeson concert. On August 25, a telegram under the signature of Mrs. Pauline Brody of Crompond, New York, and others, was dispatched to Herbert C. Gerlach, County Executive, plead-

ing for police protection in view of the threats of violence widely circulating in the Peekskill area. An appeal for protection was sent to N. Y. State Attorney General Nathaniel Goldstein. Westchester County District Attorney George Fanelli was also asked to guarantee protection.

In reply to Mrs. Brody's telegram, Mr. Gerlach answered by telegram on August 26:

"The right of free speech and free assemblage is not limited to any particular group or person. The rights of others, of course, must be protected. I have referred your telegram to the District Attorney's office and have every confidence that the matter will receive all necessary and proper attention from our law enforcement departments. I am advised that an identical telegram had already been received in the office of the District Attorney."

The competent law enforcement agencies in the area, and the supreme law enforcement agencies of the state, were appealed to. Yet no police protection was accorded the concert-goers.

That violence was generally expected, and that the withholding of adequate police protection therefore bordered on the criminally negligent, was shown in the *Peekskill Star's* account on August 27, which stated that more than 7000 persons—including 5000 marching veterans and 2000 concert-goers—were expected at the concert. Significantly, the *Peekskill Star* reported on August 29:

"Frank Niedhart, manager of the Niedhart Fife and Drum Corps, today said that his organization did not participate in Saturday night's anti-Robeson parade because many of the members are minors. *He said he did not want to bear the responsibility of possible injury to the youngsters if trouble should develop.*"

On August 30, the *Evening Star* reported that District Attorney George M. Fanelli had opened an investigation of the riot and had stated:

"The facts that I now have would indicate that the demonstration by the veterans' associations was peaceful and orderly, and that after they disbanded the pro-Robesonites provoked the violence when Secor was stabbed by one of their number."

In light of all newspaper and eye-witness reports to the contrary, and of the assertion of Mr. Flynt that the veterans he led had planned to prevent the concert, Mr. Fanelli's accusation is patently false.

Thereafter, two parallel moods prevailed in the area. The first was defensive. Denying responsibility, it attempted to thrust it on the victims. The second mood was of jubilation. Peekskill was sufficiently proud of what it had done for many automobile drivers to stick placards on their windshields reading, "WAKE UP, AMERICA, PEEKSKILL DID!"

5. American Civil Liberties Union On the Second Concert

The official investigators for the American Civil Liberties Union have formed their own independent opinions as to the action of the police.

In one sentence, it is that the Westchester County police permitted the assault upon the Robeson supporters.

This accusation is not made lightly. It is made after careful appraisal of the evidence of people of mature judgment who are non-Communists, and after consultation with responsible representatives of the Westchester and New York City press, discussion with housewives whose homes overlook the scene of action, conversations with participants in the rioting and victims of the assault, and with men who paraded in the "protest demonstration."

There can be no excuse of police inability to control a mob. The plain facts, as reported in the *Peekskill Star,* are that after the rioting was over:

"Late Sunday night, nearly a thousand guards were still on the grounds under police protection, awaiting transportation to the city. . . . State Police had trouble with the guards when they made a search of automobilies at the scene. Fighting between the pro-Reds and troopers broke out several times. Nightsticks, wielded by the gray-uniformed troopers, quelled the disturbances quickly."

The investigators are unable to conclude whether this incident was to any extent provoked by the "guards" or simply represented a last-minute assault by police who had for hours already manifested their deep hostility. In any event, it demonstrates that there is no reason to suppose that by wielding their nightsticks the police could not long before have broken up the disorderly, undisciplined mob which they had allowed to roam unchecked for hours.

If nightsticks alone were not enough, other weapons were at the disposal of the police, including tear gas shells. Yet, despite the appalling violence and the hours-long criminality of those who committed this unprovoked assault, not a single tear gas shell was set off.

From the most reliable reports it appears that the State Troopers, 200 in number out of a total of 950 police officers, performed their duty well by contrast with the County officers. While the concert was in progress, fighting broke out between the mob and late arrivals to the concert. Whenever such incidents occurred, the State Troopers swept into action, quelled the fighting, separated the combatants and, on some occasions, arrested rioters.

Three New York newspapermen, interviewed individually by ACLU representatives, two newspaper editors from different Westchester County newspapers, and two radio network news reporters, all present at the scene of action, report separately that the Westchester County police fraternized with the crowd throughout the concert despite the rising and visible mood of violence. They also assert that when the concert ended and the stoning started the Westchester police and the crowd continued their fraternization.

The investigators are led to conclude that the vast preparations by the Westchester police to prevent the outbreak of violence were a sham and that the public, the Federal authorities and the Governor of the State of New York were hoodwinked into believing that the Westchester police would restrain violence.

In regard to the stoning which occurred in Red Mill Road, Mr. Fanelli said: "The police at once converged upon the scene, moved the crowd back. . . ."

It will be noted that Mr. Fanelli, by implication, concedes that no attempt was made to disperse the crowd. The explanation for this lies in the insistence of the Westchester officials that the crowd, like the concert-goers, was exercising its constitutional right to assemble.

But the officially permitted demonstration was at an end at 2:50 p.m., 70 minutes before the concert-goers began to leave, according to Mr. Fanelli's own statement. Why, then, was the crowd permitted to remain after the veterans' parade was over? What constitutional right was the crowd exercising when it continued to loiter—for over an hour—after its officially permitted function had come to an end?

The fact is that had Mr. Fanelli dispersed the crowd from the vicinity of the concert area after the veterans' parade was over, and after it had expressed its opposition to Robeson and Communism, there then would have been no need to concentrate 1,000 police in this immediate area. The whole county might then have been policed adequately. Rioting and stoning might not then have occurred and, if it had, would probably have been minor in proportions.

6. Eyewitnesses: Quoted by Westchester Committee

A. *Dorothy S., Bronx*: "The driver of the car overheard one Westchester cop tell another that 'they ought to dive-bomb the sons of bitches.' This was said in regard to the airplanes which were flying around the area."

B. *Rose C., Brooklyn*: "Another rock smashed through the front and hit the wife of the driver, seated on the front seat. Glass cut her right arm, blood was streaming, and she became quite hysterical. The driver, upset by his wife's condition and the condition of the car as well, stopped the car and told the state trooper he would go no further unless he was given protection. The state trooper said, 'You god damn bastard, run ahead or I'll club you.'"

C. *Stephan W., N. Y. City*: "I saw a state trooper throw a rock the size of an orange at the back of our bus."

D. *Sylvia F., Forest Hills, N. Y.*: "Another stone crashed through the same window. We stopped the car. The thrower was five feet from a Westchester County policeman whose badge number was 42. He saw the incident. We asked him to arrest the man. The policeman did not answer, and when the request was repeated he ordered the driver to move on."

E. *Tom Lloyd,* member of the executive board of Local 64, International Fur and Leather Workers Union, and veteran of World War II: "As I drove out onto the paved highway, a state trooper slowed up the speed of our car by hand motions.

"The car in front of ours swerved almost out of control when hit by rocks, and I was forced to almost stop. Then a shower of rocks and

pop bottles hit our car and one broke the windshield, showering glass over the three of us in the front seat and inflicting cuts on the man sitting next to me. I put the car into second gear and drove on, the car ahead of me meanwhile having been gotten under control.

"There were state troopers and uniformed police in great numbers all along the road, but they did absolutely nothing to prevent the violence. In fact, I heard them laughing and jeering at us as we passed them with our battered cars."

F. *Henry F., of Brooklyn,* arrived with some other World War II veterans to help prepare for the concert. "The paraders were shouting all kinds of profane language. One shouted, 'We'll give you solidarity, we'll make you eat it!' Then, with a grin on his face, 'Dewey is going to protect you, oh yeah!' "

After the concert, he and other concert guards started to ride toward the entrance. "Suddenly, as if from out of nowhere a bunch of troopers swooped down on our cars and yelled, 'Get out of the cars!' Before we could comply, however, they were pulling us out to the side of the road. I saw the driver in the car in front of our car get hit in the kidneys by a cop for protesting the rough treatment. The troopers threw out everything in the car that wasn't fastened down, from the glove compartment and from the trunk. They ordered us back into the cars.

"A moment later another bunch of about fifteen deputies and police ordered us out of the cars again, this time roughing us up worse than the troopers. Some of them evidently had had something to drink. Their faces were red and they were wild, and swinging indiscriminately at everyone with their clubs.

"They ordered us into the cars once more. A moment later another group of deputies and police ordered us out of the car. This time I remarked to my companions, 'Here we go, out again and in again.' One cop overheard me and yelled, 'Hey, this son of a bitch is talking back!' Whereupon a group of cops and deputies set upon me and the car occupants in the most violent and vicious manner that I have ever experienced. One grabbed me by the collar and throat at the same time and threw me to the ground, face down in the dirt, a distance of about eight feet from the car, and started beating us all. My shirt and suit were badly torn. Another cop dragged me to my feet and said, 'Get in and get going, you red bastard!' Another, who was obviously a cap-

tain of police, said, 'Go back to Jew town, and if we ever catch you up here again we'll kill you!' "

G. *John N., New Jersey*: "One of the troopers said, 'Let's get these bastards.' One of them stopped at the front right window where I sat. He took careful aim and shoved his nightstick, point first, at my left eye. I ducked my head when I saw it coming. The club missed the eyeball and caught the corner of the lid. It began to bleed, and when I brought my head up, he aimed at the eye again. I fended the club off with my arm.

"The police ordered us out of the car. Then, as we got out, they began to club us over the head.

"I was forced to run through a gauntlet of 15 to 20 policemen. Each of them clubbed me across the head or back. I tried to escape. They threw me to the ground and continued the beating. One of the policemen noticed a bandage on my left hand, which had been burned a week before. He jumped on the hand and ground his heel into the bandage, fracturing one of the burned fingers."

H. *Sarah M., Bronx*: "I saw several injured people ask the troopers and policemen for help. They were not only refused help, but were laughed at, called such names as 'Dirty Jew,' 'Dirty n——,' and some of those injured were hit with the billies of the policemen. I also saw some troopers and policemen throw rocks at the cars and buses."

I. *William G., Queens*: "As we were riding by, several of the state troopers cursed at us with epithets like 'Get out of here, you dirty so-and-so's.' 'You got what was coming to you, you dirty n——lovers.' I saw the state troopers joking and talking to the very hoodlums who were endangering our lives."

J. *Marvin L., Flushing, L. I.*: "During all of this, the cops used all kinds of vile epithets, *i.e.*, 'Spread their legs and hit them in the groin.' This last was to the cops who were beating the men in the car ahead."

7. James Hicks: *Afro-American*

"I saw Jean Bullard knocked down at my feet and brutally kicked and beaten by state troopers as he lay on the ground because he spat at an anti-Robeson veteran who had spit in his face.

"I saw a colored man who was in his car and on his way home dragged from his car, hit over the head while he was being dragged out, beaten on the ground by the troopers as he attempted to crawl under his car for protection. He was then dragged from underneath the car and beaten with clubs by four troopers as he crawled helplessly down the narrow road leading to the concert area."

Appendix III

The Victims

1. Sidney Marcus: A Peekskill Case History by Howard Fast

Reprinted from *The New York Fur Worker*

On September 4, 1949, when the bad trouble of Peekskill happened, Sidney Marcus was where you would expect to find him, a part of the inside circle of fur workers who made an honor guard for Paul Robeson. If someone had said, such and such is Sidney Marcus, you would have looked for a tall, broad-set young man of twenty-eight, maybe a hundred and eighty pounds, big of limb and wide on his feet, with the large competent hands of a worker; the face is open, round and honest. A good man if things should become rough, but it is rougher on the truck where one of his brothers stands between Robeson and the dirty sniper, lying on the hillside, waiting for a chance to shoot the way his kind have always shot.

But, as you know, nothing happened in the summer sunshine of the morning, and Sidney Marcus stood in his place and his brother stood on the truck, and beyond the thousands who listened to the singing, they could see the line of workers on the outside perimeter, stretching over hill and dale, trade union men against the fascist scum parading back and forth on the road.

And in time, the day would be over, and Sidney Marcus would go back to his wife Sylvia whom he had not seen in six weeks. That was

because things had been bad for ten months before this morning, which I will have to explain somewhat. Sidney Marcus had been a cutter, good, skilled work which paid over a hundred a week; but not good work when you don't get it, and in all that time of ten months he had only two weeks of work. And because his little girl, Pauline, five years old, had developed a bronchial condition and needed fresh air and a touch of sunshine, his wife had become a waitress in a summer place and the little girl had gone with her. A man gets lonely for a wife and kid, but now theirs was going to be a good homecoming, since only two days before this, Sidney Marcus had gotten a new job, a good job, a steady job.

And he would have seen them both today if not for his being there. The funny part of it was that when his local business agent called up the night before and told him that they wanted some workers to see Robeson through at Peekskill, the kid was coughing again. Otherwise, all three of them would have been here today, in this lovely valley and lovely sunshine and country place.

The concert finished, and Sidney Marcus did his job, which was to stand guard—stand guard for a people's artist, a tall, brave man with a deep and wonderful voice. Which was proper, for his voice was the workers' voice, and their way of acknowledging it was to make a wall between him and the sick, distorted creatures of fascism who postured and gestured on the road.

Then Sidney Marcus started home, in a bus full of workers, their wives and their kids; and as the bus passed out onto the road, the rocks came flying, hurled by the brave defenders of "the American way of life." The kids and some of the women lay down on the floor of the bus. But some had to sit up and watch the way; the driver had to sit up and drive his bus, and Sidney Marcus sat next to him, and there he was sitting when a great rock was hurled through the windshield and caught him full in the face, rock and a thousand pieces of knife-like glass full in the face; so that this worker who was sitting there one moment strong and unafraid, was the next moment in agony and pain, with a mass of bloody, broken flesh where his face had been, with no nose where his nose had been, with splinters of smashed bone where his cheek had been, and with a glass-torn mask of horror where his eyes had been.

This in a moment, and so was America defended by such filth as had defended Nazi Germany; and later, in the course of Sidney Marcus' treatment, Dr. Joseph Goldman, former Lieutenant Colonel in charge of plastic reconstruction in Western Europe, was moved to remark that never, in all his war experience, had he seen a wound so horrible, so painful, so destructive as this.

But in the bus, Sidney Marcus had no comparative knowledge; he only knew as he lay in his blood and his comrades tried to make him comfortable, that the pain was dreadful—and he was no stranger to pain. The bus halted and they asked a state trooper for help, and the trooper gave them a string of obscene curses and beat them on with his club, and told them to "find the god damned hospital by themselves!" So by themselves, they found Peekskill Hospital, where those who carried Sidney Marcus inside were met with hatred, anti-Semitism and implied threats. Not relief from pain—such as one gives to the enemy in wartime—but hatred and threats. . . .

And thereby began for Sidney Marcus eight weeks of a most peculiar and awful hell, eight weeks of blindness, eight weeks of unremitting pain. His sinus nerves were smashed. His cheek-bone was pulverized. His nose had to be reconstructed plastically. One eye was gone forever, cut to pieces by glass. The other eye is still in danger. He had to submit to operation without anesthetic; he had to lie sleepless for days, wondering whether he would ever see again. Moved finally to Mt. Sinai Hospital, he lay for what seemed to be endless days and nights, racked by pain which can only be noted, not described. "The nerves are mending," they told him. "The nerves are building." This was a Jewish hospital, so there was no anti-Semitism; but a doctor in attendance, Dr. Mark Baum was his name, picked up the Peekskill thread, and taunted the blinded, pain-racked worker with news that eleven Communists had been sentenced to prison.

So Sidney Marcus learned the role of the working class; blinded, suffering, looking for a future where he could find only pain and more pain, he learned the quality of hatred that capitalism distills and he reflected upon the price that the worker pays for fascism. His was the essence of the price, a deeper hurt, but in other ways no different from the endless and countless hurts inflicted on American workers for a hundred years. Still denied to him was the day he had planned to

spend with his wife and his child, and now there was the ghost risen of all the days ahead that he could not plan for—since how does the wife and child live, when the husband, a worker, is blinded?

Then there came a day when he was able to open one eye just a little, and through the stabbing barbs of light, there was sight. Since then, a good deal of the sight in that eye has returned, but there is no positive assurance yet that he will retain his sight.

Now there is this to say—for what are we when we forget a Sidney Marcus? If we forget, who will remember? So there is this to say, concerning a Colonel Sweeney, a representative of the little man who is governor of New York State, who came to visit Sidney Marcus at Peekskill Hospital; and there he hammered at the man behind the broken flesh and the bandages, saying:

"Who paid you, Sidney Marcus? Who paid you to come to Peekskill with Robeson?" Asking him, "In the name of the governor of New York State, who paid you, Sidney Marcus?"

The old refrain of the dishonorable ones; all things they can measure with a buck, including the soul of a man.

"God damn you to hell," cried Sidney Marcus, "I am a worker, do you understand, a fur worker in Ben Gold's union!"

Well, we learn a little at a time, and how slowly, and with how much pain; but our debt to Sidney Marcus is that we learn, and that debt is still unpaid. As he said, he knew what he was doing; his mother and his father were workers and his two brothers as well; and he hasn't any regrets, and this wasn't the first time he went out on a picket line or a demonstration, and it came to him this way and to others in Spain and to others in France or North Africa. Peekskill is as good a place as any, providing we don't forget.

Sidney Marcus is not going to forget; the score was engraved upon him, his body and his heart and his hopes; so he knows the score. He wants other people to know, and in that desire, he is right.

2. Eyewitnesses: Quoted by Westchester Committee

A. *H. K. on the first concert*: "At 8:15 I left the defense lines on the bridge and made my way through the ambush to telephone the state

police. When I got out to the highway I saw a long line of cars waiting in the dark. As I stood there, a Negro and two white people approached the entrance to the grounds. They were stopped by a mob, which surrounded them and began to push them around. As I watched, I saw about a dozen men detach themselves from the mob and push the Negro up against an embankment. I followed. The Negro kept saying, 'I'm an American! I have a right to attend this concert!' Suddenly, one of the men struck him. He went down and the gang piled on top of him yelling, 'Kill him! Let's finish him!' They were beating him unmercifully. I saw them kick him in the body and step on his neck. Then I saw a man in soldier's uniform standing on the side. I said to him, 'Come on, buddy, this ain't right,' He said, 'That's right, this ain't the American way,' and dashed into the gang. I managed to half drag the Negro through some parked cars and into the woods. If I hadn't, I think they would have murdered him."

B. *Irving W., Corona, N. Y.*: "Repeatedly, men in their late twenties and also middle aged, wearing American Legion hats, and light blue overseas caps of another organization, came up to the low stone wall near me, screamed filthy unprintable remarks, shook their fists and threatened, 'You'll never get out of here alive!' and 'Wait till you yellow bastards try to leave tonight!' These were definitely mature participants of the parade and not teen-age boys."

C. *Max B., N. Y. City*: "Suddenly a rock shattered the closed window on the right side where I was sitting. I was in the front seat. I immediately took off my glasses. This was followed by another rock which hit the windshield directly in front of me. The third rock crashed against the side window nearest me. I found blood on my face, my left ear, my right elbow. There were fine particles of glass around my eyes, both arms, and my chest."

D. *Bernice B., Brooklyn*: "Our driver tried to drive as quickly as he could, but the police kept slowing us down.

"One of the men in the bus yelled, 'Duck!', but before she could duck she saw a rock come through the window and felt both her eyes, her mouth, and her right hand burn. As soon as possible one of the people bandaged her eyes, and had her spit out saliva combined with blood and glass fragments."

E. *Robert A., Bronx*: "I took the bleeding woman to the Peekskill Hos-

pital. When I tried to go upstairs and inquire about her, I was almost thrown out bodily. I cannot actually describe this entire affair, because it was like a nightmare. Block after block the crowd was throwing rocks and laughing. It was unbelievable. It's only a miracle that every passenger in the car was not killed."

F. *Charles M., Bronx*: reported that his bus was "stopped at Hartsdale by police of Greenburgh. All the way down, the bus was chased by cars who tried to run them off the road. People in the bus were covered with flying glass. They were stoned all the way to Briarcliff Manor. People came out of the bars to stone them."

G. *Tim M., Bronx*: "Never in my life have I seen innocent people attacked with such viciousness. I was born and raised in Ireland. I saw the Black and Tans at their worst. I have read of, and seen documentary films of, Fascist and Nazi atrocities in Europe. Last Sunday I saw the same thing happen in Peekskill, only more vicious. I saw American fascists, without provocation, deliberately attack, with intent to kill, peaceful, law-abiding citizens who were returning to their homes after attending an American musical concert, while the lily-white forces of law and order stood idly by.

"Fear to speak out at this time against these fascist attacks makes us silent partners of the attackers."

H. *Nina P., N. Y.*: "A group of hoodlums came directly in front of the bus and threw a huge boulder in. This boulder struck my left hand and when I looked down I saw that the third joint of my middle finger was barely hanging by one tendon. Witnessing this whole incident were state troopers who were laughing.

"As the stones kept coming, all I could think of was: This is not America. This is Nazi Germany. I don't want to live like this.

"The surgeon considered it necessary to amputate the third joint and part of the second so that the tendons could cross and I would have most use of the finger."

3. *N. Y. Herald Tribune*
August 29, 1949

"Members of the audience entered cars and started up the hill. As they neared the top, they were stopped by a road block of boulders and

logs, and ordered out of or pulled from the vehicles. The men were manhandled, the women permitted to depart with jeers. The machines were smashed on tops, sides and windows with rocks and eight of them turned over. They were removed by wreckers about 2 o'clock this morning."

4. Leslie Matthews, Staff Correspondent for the Negro Paper, *New York Age*

"This is being written a few short hours after my departure from the Hell on Earth that was Peekskill, N. Y., this Sunday before Labor Day, 1949. I still hear the frenzied roar of crowds, the patter of stones against glass and flesh. I hear the wails of women, the impassioned screams of children, the jeers and taunts of wildeyed youths, I still smell the sickening odor of blood flowing from freshly opened wounds, gasoline fumes from autos and buses valiantly trying to carry their loads of human targets out of the range of bricks, bottles, stones, sticks. I still feel the violence, the chaos, which permeated the air. I still hear, smell, and feel Peekskill."

Appendix IV

1. *Daily Compass*, Monday, Sept. 5, 1949, by Leon Edel

"The *Daily Compass* switchboard was flooded with calls from hundreds of eyewitnesses. Many were so frightened they refused to give their names.

"David Fanshel of 237 E. 194th St., The Bronx, said he saw Negroes beaten by grey-clad cops at Peekskill while they were on their way to the concert.

"Paul Ross, ALP candidate for City Controller, described the scene as follows:

"'As we were driving from the concert ground, about 100 yards

out, one of thousands of hoodlums lining the route threw a rock that went through our rear window and hit a girl in the head.

" 'Her name is Diana Gasarch, 18, of 205 Seabreeze Ave., Brooklyn, and we rushed her to Bellevue for treatment. My wife, sitting in the front seat, was scratched by the glass.

" 'The police—local and State Troopers—were stationed about 100 feet apart and the hoodlums behind them were yelling, 'Get out of here, Jew-kikes,' and throwing rocks.

" 'I didn't see one cop do anything to stop them.

" 'We stopped the car at a gas station just after Diana was hit, and one of the hoodlums, about 55 and drunk, pulled the door open.

" 'A State Trooper was standing by. I slammed the door shut and called the State Trooper.

" 'I've got an injured girl here,' I told him.

" 'Never mind; move on,' he said.

" 'The peculiar thing is that they routed the cars through Peekskill, where the trouble originated.

" 'We patched up Diana's wound a little, but couldn't stop because of the mobs, and drove right into New York.' "

"Milton Wolff, of 205 E. 42nd Street, reported:

" 'Every window of my car was smashed, and one of the women occupants was hurt.

" 'This was in the presence of State Troopers and deputies. They were slowing the cars down as we left, making us more or less sitting ducks for the rocks.

" 'We were going up the road, a clear, one-way road, as fast as we could, and the State Troopers slowed us down.

" 'The stone throwers were up on an embankment 10 or 15 feet above the road and there was only a handful at this point, maybe 20. Police could easily have dispersed them.' "

" 'Albert Ginsburg, 23, of 4 Stuyvesant Oval, member of Local 1250, Department Store Union, said that as he drove from the concert grounds, a crowd of hoodlums, lining both sides of the hillside, including uniformed Legionnaires, shouted:

" 'N——loving Jews, down South we'd string you up. Go back to Moscow.' "

Appendix V

Was the Stoning Planned?

From the Report of American Civil Liberties Union

There is no ground for believing that every man or woman who participated in the rioting had gone to the concert area with that intention. However, there is simple evidence that many of them had exactly that purpose in mind and, with the greatest of care, had planned to that end.

A woman witness, holding paid office in one of Peekskill's churches, testifies that three independent witnesses, each of whom is willing to testify before responsible federal authorities if called upon to do so, claims that on the morning of Sept. 4th, a car driven by veterans was loading rocks in the area of Shrub Oak Park Colony. The license plate number of this car, she asserts, is 4D267.

Another witness asserts that on the afternoon of Saturday, September 3, a carload of young men drew up outside her property and began loading rocks into the luggage compartment.

Another claims that he was not present at the riot and, in fact, was forty miles or so north of the riot area on Sept. 4th. On the morning of the 4th, he stopped to talk with a State Trooper of whom he asked how it happened that he was not on duty down State, near Peekskill. The trooper answered that he had been assigned to duty elsewhere in the state and that he was not at all sorry over the fact. The two discussed the general purpose of the "demonstration." The witness was informed that the apparent purpose of the veterans was to take Hillside Avenue by sheer mass, to keep marching and countermarching and to make it physically impossible for anyone to get to the concert grounds. Asked whether physical violence was publicly threatened, the State Trooper answered:

"I dunno. But somebody told me the whole road was lined with rocks."

When asked who picked the rocks, the trooper answered:

"I don't know—but I hope it's the veterans."

This exchange occurred at approximately noon of the day of the riot, some hours before the concert was scheduled to begin.

A second newspaper witness reports that a mile and a half from the concert ground he saw a station wagon with baskets of rocks loaded on its running board.

The wide extent of the stoning indicates careful planning on the part of some person or persons. It can hardly be coincidence that, as cars with broken windows streamed down the county towards New York, they were met with volleys of stones in community after community through which they passed.

Appendix VI

CBS On-the-Spot Recording

At Peekskill, along with scores of newspaper reporters and cameramen, were radio commentators. Here are excerpts from the CBS on-the-spot recording of what happened near the entrance gate. The recording was broadcast that same evening. These excerpts were taken down on a home wire recorder by a member of the committee:

(Shouts by crowd) "Go back to Russia!" "Hey, go on back to Russia, you n——s!"

(Voice of man making recording) "Coming along here is another group of veterans. Apparently they have broken up their parade into sections. This section is led by a former army major in uniform, a marine, an army private, two sailors, an army sergeant . . . (Sound of drums, growing louder) . . . and a very pretty girl leading the band."

(Confused shouting by crowd. Then voice of man making recording) . . . "has been the first bit of violence. I don't know who started it. Police have grabbed someone here. Police are pushing everyone back. The parade is broken up at the entrance and the veterans are running back here." (Roaring noise from crowd.) "Police helicopter is overhead. The first bit of violence—the first outbreak of fighting—began when one man broke through the opposite side of the road, through the veterans' lines, and punched one of the men in the concert grounds.

Hundreds and hundreds of people here. If there's a serious outbreak, it will be very bad." (In shaking voice) "The situation has gotten very tense here. There is no longer any order to the parade—just men moving back and forth on the highway, blocking the entrance to the concert area."

(Speaking more rapidly) "Skirmishes are breaking out all over here. —The police—are beating up a Negro. (Crowd noises) "They're clubbing him.—He's right here. . . ."

Appendix VII

Anti-Semitism

1. Report of the American Civil Liberties Union

Anti-Semitism was less marked at the second riot than at the first. Negrophobia was also less marked. On the other hand, transcripts made by radio reporters at the second riot record a new and fearsome epithet, "White n——s," shouted at Jews seen associating with colored people.

The New York *Daily Compass* on September 15 reproduced a photograph of a sticker removed from one of the buses carrying concert-goers. The bus and one house in Peekskill were "plastered" with these stickers which read: "COMMUNISM IS TREASON. BEHIND COMMUNISM STANDS—THE JEW! THEREFORE, FOR MY COUNTRY —AGAINST THE JEWS."

One such sticker is now in the possession of the ACLU. According to the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith this sticker is identical in color, type-face and border design to smaller stickers mailed to this country by Einar Aberg, the Swedish anti-Semite. The investigators are informed that these stickers normally came from Sweden in small lots and are sent out to a haphazard mailing list. They are received along with other anti-Semitic literature, which includes extensive references to the forged Protocols of the Elders' of Zion. A serious

question arises as to whether contact has been established by some one in the Peekskill area and Einar Aberg in Sweden or his colleagues, if any, in this country. Alternatively, it should be determined whether these stickers are now being reproduced by the photo-offset process in the U.S.A.

It is not suggested that the Peekskill riots were precipitated by an organized anti-Semtic group. However, the rudiments of organized anti-Semitism—as distinguished from latent anti-Semitism—seem now to have made their appearance in the Peekskill area.

The *Daily Compass* of Thursday, September 15, reproduced a letter sent out after the first riot, over the signature of Edward James Smythe, Chairman of the Protestant War Veterans of the United States.

"My dear ———

"This was just a picnic, and a foreshadow of coming events that you seen in Peekskill, Saturday night.

"You Jews, and we mean you Communistic Jews, have made yourselves obnoxious and offensive to the American people, and you are only using the American Negro as a "Front" in your criminal un-American activities. . . .

"Dewey, under high pressure of the Communist Jews 'Outlawed' the Klan in Jew York State, but we are stronger than ever there, and at the moment, we are on a militant campaign for more and additional members, and I can assure you now, that hundreds are coming in every week right there in Westchester County . . . you would be surprised to know just who is joining us, in the fight on Judeo-Communism, some of your highest officials, and big business executives, they have at long last awakened to the dangerous Internal (sic) Jew and his traitorous activities.

"Your Race KILLED CHRIST on the Cross, we burn it, we burn it as a warning and a symbol to BEWARE."

2. German Analogy

(a) Andernach

The man who makes the statement below is a refugee from Nazi Germany. He came to America in 1940, served three and a half years

in our armed forces and was wounded on Guam. He attended the Robeson concert in Peekskill. We cannot use his full name for fear of consequences to himself and members of his family.—*Ed.*

"I saw in Peekskill a repetition of the day in November of 1939 when I was finally driven from my home in the Rhineland town of Andernach. I was not yet thirteen years old on that day, which saw the final outbursts of anti-Semitic violence throughout Nazi Germany prior to the wholesale massacre of my people in that unhappy land.

"Like Peekskill, Andernach is a town of some 15,000. We knew that gray November morning that we would feel the wrath of the Nazi hoodlum gangs. A desperate Polish Jewish youth in Paris had assassinated a Nazi diplomat, to provide Herr Hitler and his minions with just the excuse they were looking for, to eliminate us, as well as Catholics and other minority groups who might perhaps be a little less than fanatical in their support of the Nazi cut-throat regime.

"We had barricaded our homes that day, we remaining Jews in Germany. The adult menfolk had been taken from us under 'protective custody,' to make sure there was no resistance. The howling mobs came in the evening with great piles of stones which they threw into our homes.

"My mother and I were wounded. When the hoodlums broke through the front door, we ran out of the rear entrance into the streets, where we were again stoned as we fled. From that day I was a wanderer until I came to America many months later.

"There was the same rock-throwing with intent to kill at Peekskill as there was at Andernach. But even more striking for me was the psychopathic hatred, the hysteria of the hoodlum mob. Both acted and looked exactly the same.

"There was, too, the same obvious organization from bigshot officials using the backward, ignorant, bigoted sections of the population to do their dirty work while trying to make it appear that it was spontaneous, unorganized. The military-like tactics used so as to do an official job of butchery were evident in both cases, as was the distortion of symbols of patriotism which the fascists took unto themselves to try to justify their savage deeds.

"In both cases, too, the official instruments of 'law and order' stood by approvingly while the mob did its murderous work.

"I had pushed from my memory those childish days of terror and anxiety. Now they are revived with enormous force, for there is no mistaking the similarity. I can only do all in my power, as an American citizen, a veteran and one who has lived through the Hitler terror, to help to arouse those good people—the great majority of whom, like my neighbors, did not like what was happening but awakened too late to prevent it."

(b) Bernau

From an article in the *National Guardian* by Heinz Pol, dated September 12, 1949.

It was a balmy spring evening in Bernau, a little town about 30 miles north of Berlin, Germany, more than 20 years ago. The Weimar Republic seemed to be secure and strong, and new Reichstag elections were on.

I was helping Georg Bernhard in his campaign as candidate of the German Democratic Party. Bernhard, editor of the *Vossiseche Zeitung* in Berlin, was not popular with certain groups who taught that Germany was the greatest country in the world, and that everyone opposed to their way of thinking was a Jew or a Red or un-German, and must be dealt with accordingly.

VETERANS MOBILIZED: These parties and groups, led by such parties as Hitler and Hugenberg (the latter now an advisor to the British occupation authorities and a member of the Ruhr Industrial Committee) announced that Bernhard could not speak in Bernau, stronghold of the 100 percent Germans.

Officials of the Democratic Party at Bernau told the local police that stormtroopers, the Stahlheim and other war veterans' organizations, had concentrated in and around the town. The police assured party officials that everything would be under control.

When Bernhard's car arrived, two police cars joined us. The streets were lined with jeering members of the Hitler-Hugenberg private armies. They continued to jeer at us in the big meeting hall.

When the police opened the doors an hour before the meeting, they found 200 husky young men already seated in the front rows. One Democratic Party official protested. The police officer in charge reassured

him, "Don't worry, these boys are only friends of the son of the proprietor of the meeting hall—just kids having a little fun."

THE "FUN" STARTS: The kids began enjoying themselves a little later, interrupting the speakers, singing war songs, throwing paper swastikas and molesting anyone who dared approve the speakers' remarks. Even amid cries like, "Next time we'll cut your throat before you open your mouth, you dirty Jew," Bernhard was able to finish his speech.

Escorted by five policemen who had stood idly by during the meeting, we went to our car. All four tires had been slashed and we had to wait for replacements. Then the police captain saluted, and said: "I hope you'll agree that my men did an excellent job protecting you. We'll take you to the gates of the town and leave you there; then you'll have the straight road back to Berlin."

The road was straight. So was the wire stretched across it about three miles outside of Bernau. We would all have been killed, but our driver had seen some suspicious-looking people along the road, and instinctively slowed down.

When we left the car to cut the wire, we were showered with stones and rocks from both sides of the road. We couldn't see much. Bernhard's glasses were broken, his head gashed. My shoulder was injured.

We heard an order snapped: "Finish those skunks fast, and without noise." We ran for cover behind the trees. Fortunately, a truck came by.

Our attackers disappeared with our car. The truck took us to the nearest hospital. Five days later we were able to continue the campaign. But we were not allowed to return to Bernau because the City Council, on the recommendation of the chief of police, decided that Bernhard was a controversial figure who presented a threat to the peaceful minds of the population.

Bernhard's car was found in a ditch near Bernau, completely smashed. The police said they had no fingerprints but were sure the car had been stolen and wrecked by communists.

All that happened long ago, of course. It couldn't possibly happen again, in America. Only an eccentric like me, with a warped European mind, who should have stayed in Germany and been beaten to a pulp by stormtroopers, can wonder whether Bernau lies a few miles north

of New York, and Peekskill a few miles north of Berlin, or vice versa.

(Heinz Pol was assistant editor of the *Vossiseche Zeitung* in Berlin for ten years before the Nazis seized power. In 1933 he fled Germany and later came to the U.S. He has written several books about European politics and economics.)

Appendix VIII

Aftermath

National Revulsion

The Peekskill rioters apparently believed that no "true American" would disapprove their action. They were sadly mistaken.

The New York *Herald-Tribune* (9-6-49) stated:

". . . true Americans must feel deep shame and concern for the quality of citizenship that believes it is defending its country by catcalls and boos and rocks thrown at passing automobiles. . . ."

The *New York Times* (9-4-49):

"Civil rights are rarely threatened except when those who claim them hold views hateful to the majority."

New York Sun (8-29-49):

"The local and county police clearly let the demonstration against the concert degenerate into a riot."

New York Post (9-6-49):

". . . A mob of hoodlums has run wild . . . proclaiming its contempt for democratic process, inflicting violence on real and alleged Communists and innocent bystanders with fine and frenzied impartiality. . . ."

Christian Science Monitor (9-6-49):

"This is the Fascist pattern of violent suppression. The Ku Klux Klan pattern of lynch law. . . ."

Fort Wayne (Indiana) News Sentinel (9-15-49):

"Whether or not Mr. Robeson follows the Kremlin manual is of less concern than that Americans shall not forget the First Amendment to the Constitution."

Des Moines Register (9-7-49):

"Those who gathered at Peekskill to hear Robeson were entirely within the law in doing so. Those who provoked the violence repudiated the Constitution, the Government and those things which Americans have long prided themselves on—fairness and freedom."

Baltimore Sun (9-6-49):

"It is bad enough to know that such scenes could take place in a land presumably enlightened and presumably dedicated to the principles of free assembly and free speech. . . ."

Milwaukee Journal (9-6-49):

"There can be no surrender to mob rule and intimidation by force, from any quarter."

Indianapolis Times (9-7-49):

"The shameful violence that occurred after the Robeson meeting does not make pretty reading in American newspapers nor in the foreign press."

Akron (Ohio) Beacon-Journal (9-12-49):

". . . A strange kind of patriotism. . . ."

Oregonian (Portland) (8-30-49):

"Violence settles nothing . . . Robeson had a Constitutional right to sing and to express his ideas at a public meeting. . . ."

St. Louis Post-Dispatch (8-29-49):

"Veterans' organizations in Westchester County, New York, lowered themselves to the level of the Ku Klux Klan. . . ."

Mr. George M. Craig, National Commander of the American Legion, issued the following statement on September 21, 1949:

"The American Legion believes in the preservation of law and order and does not countenance violence in any situation short of war. The Legion will not give its official sanction to counter-demonstrations such as those at Peekskill. It prefers to leave pro-Communist demonstrations strictly alone."

The national headquarters of the Jewish War Veterans issued a directive to all units, prohibiting them from "initiating or participating in any public demonstration which poses potential consequence of riot or public disorder."

Yet even despite—or perhaps because of—the failure of this deliberate rioting to bestow leadership and national acclaim upon the anti-liber-

tarians of Peekskill, the Associated Veterans' Council announced after the second riot that it planned a mass "patriotic" demonstration and parade on Sunday, October 2. In response to this obstinate claim to pride in what had occurred, Peekskill's first pronounced reaction against the rioting was expressed on September 15, through the words of thirteen Protestant and Jewish local clergymen:

"We, the undersigned clergy of Peekskill and surrounding communities, desire to express our attitude toward the recent disturbances at Hollow Brook and the aftermath in the community. . . . Acts of violence have been committed. Lies, malicious rumors about responsible citizens, vilification and inflammatory language about members of our minority races and faiths have been circulated. A vicious example of lawlessness has been held up to the world as our way of life. . . . There is no need to try to convince ourselves or the world that the ugliness is not real or that it is not here . . . we must admit our fault and mistake. Admitting them, let us show shame and contrition for these violent and unlawful acts and attitudes. That outward and visible expression be given to this by a day of repentance and prayer in our places of worship on Sunday, Sept. 18th. . . ."

A separate statement was made by the Rev. Joseph Stuhr, Catholic pastor of the Church of Assumption, in which he condemned the use of violence. "Acts of violence are contrary to the teachings of our church and the lawful procedure required by our form of government. While offended sensibilities are understandable they offer no excuse for violence. The use of force solves nothing. Instead it accentuates grievances and promotes discord and disunity."

A not dissimilar statement was later signed by clergymen in Scarsdale, New Rochelle and Mount Vernon.

Under this growing pressure from religious groups, the Associated Veterans' Council found it ill-advised to hold a patriotic mass rally. Eventually, the face-saving device was adopted of merging the proposed "patriotic" demonstration with the traditional Armistice Day Parade which Peekskill holds each November 11.

The Town Council of Cortlandt, scene of the riots, early in October passed an ordinance requiring permits to be obtained before public meetings could be held. The unconstitutionality of such an ordinance was clearly settled, as the town members of Cortlandt knew, in the

American Civil Liberties Union test of the Jersey City Ordinance enacted by the then Mayor Frank Hague, in 1937. On the 18th of October, the town of Cortlandt enacted a second ordinance, making it a criminal offense to give a speech or to hold a meeting which is intended to break down law enforcement. The effect of this would be to penalize the sponsors of a meeting if it were attacked by an outside group. Thus, responsibility for the outbreak of violence at the concert would have been the sponsors, even though the attack was made by the inflamed veterans' group.

As Arthur Garfield Hays, general counsel of the ACLU, insisted to the Town Council, such an ordinance was clearly unconstitutional under the Supreme Court's recent decision in the Terminiello case, was simply a club to use against unpopular minorities, and would make such minorities criminal because of what their opponents might do to them. The ACLU immediately announced its intention to bring a test case of both ordinances.

Four Yale Law School professors called upon Attorney General McGrath to launch a federal investigation of the outrages because Governor Dewey "from the beginning failed to take decisive action." They said that "positive measures on behalf of the American tradition of political freedom must be taken now. If a situation of this sort is allowed to drift, without action from the leaders of our government, it can only too quickly get completely out of hand."

Signers of this statement were Professors Thomas I. Emerson, Fleming James, Jr., Fowler Harper and David Haber.

Clifford J. Durr, president of the National Lawyers Guild, appealed for a federal inquiry: "Any idea that the present officials of the State of New York could be relied upon to vindicate the ends of justice and the principles of democracy without federal intervention should be completely set aside by the statement and action of Governor Dewey on ordering a grand jury inquiry."

The American Veterans Committee (AVC), through its National Vice-Chairman, Joseph A. Clorety, Jr., called upon national leaders of the Legion, the VFW, CWV and JWV, "to prevent further outrages such as have occurred in Peekskill." The AVC said it blamed Peekskill veterans' organizations for the "two disgraceful episodes."

Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt stated: "This is not the type of thing

that we believe in the United States. I dislike everything that Paul Robeson is now saying. . . . I still believe, however, that if he wants to give a concert, or speak his mind in public, no one should prevent him from doing so. No one who disagrees is obliged to stay or even to go to hear him."